

THE ENGAGING LINE: E. MERVYN TAYLOR'S
PRINTS ON MAORI SUBJECTS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the

requirements for The Degree

of Master of Arts in Art History

in the University of Canterbury

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2006

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Abstract

E. Mervyn Taylor (1906–1964) was a pakeha artist whose prints drew influence from Maori culture and motif. He was one of a small number of artists who developed interest in Maori culture during the 1940s and 1950s. He expanded interest into detailed study of Maori culture, and interaction with Maori, and produced a significant body of prints on this subject during his career. Taylor's prints were acclaimed during his lifetime, but in the decades after his death, his reputation faded to the extent that he became relatively obscure. This persisted until the late 1980s, when art historical reassessment of his work began. This thesis forms a part of this continued re-evaluation. It focuses on Taylor's prints on Maori subjects, an area not sufficiently scrutinised in an academic context. It aims to reach deeper understanding of his prints through historical analysis of the factors that influenced him to choose Maori, and their culture as subjects for his artwork. The thesis also examines why Taylor's reputation was so emphatically based on his New Zealand heritage, as well as the quality of his craftsmanship, his beliefs about which formed the foundation of his philosophy. Nationalist and regionalist notions also figured in his aesthetic ideals. His prints are also placed in relation to the modern debate over cultural appropriation in art. Greater recognition and understanding of Taylor's oeuvre may be achieved by establishing why he chose Maori subjects, and what specific features they contributed to the character of his work.

Introduction

E. Mervyn Taylor (1906–1964) was a pakeha artist whose prints drew influence from Maori culture and motif. Taylor developed an interest in Maori culture during the 1940s and 1950s and he expanded this interest into detailed study of Maori culture, and interaction with Maori. He is unique for the extent to which he came to understand Maori people, and for his interpretation of their culture in his prints. His prints on these subjects were exceptionally rich, and developed themes of Maori culture and stories from Maori mythology as an aspect of New Zealand identity. The latter became particularly important to Taylor, and he based the most significant project of his career on the depiction of these myths through a series of wood engravings. It is indicative of his feeling for these mythological stories that he became popularly synonymous with engravings of these during his lifetime.

Taylor's use of Maori subjects in his artwork is important because, for him, they represented part of New Zealand national identity, and he worked hard to bring attention to Maori through his art. Now, these prints are important because they expose Maori subjects at a time when their culture remained marginalised from mainstream New Zealand society. The prints are also significant as an intriguing synthesis of elements from two cultures, and for their considerable artistic quality; he was a consummate engraver and designer. During the decades after his death, his reputation faded; Taylor, a once renowned and popular artist, became relatively obscure. This obscurity persisted until the late 1980s, when art historians such as Tony Mackle began to reassess his works and overall significance in twentieth century art.¹ There has been incremental change in his status since then, so that today, Taylor is again becoming known and respected as an artist.

This thesis forms a part of a continuing re-evaluation of his work and focuses on his prints on Maori subjects, an area not sufficiently scrutinised or appreciated in an academic context. The aim of the thesis is to reveal a greater understanding of his prints through analysing factors that influenced him to turn to Maori and their culture as his subject. He was an accomplished technician in the different media he chose through his career, and made significant contributions as a painter, sculptor, muralist

¹ T. Mackle, "E. Mervyn Taylor (1906-64)," *Art New Zealand* 1988-89.

and commercial artist. It is not the intention of this thesis to examine his work outside of prints. His other works, however, informed the rest of his practice, and as such it would lack balance to study his prints without occasional recourse to their greater context in his oeuvre. The original source material for this thesis is based mainly in archives in Wellington. These demonstrate Taylor's involvement with every aspect of the visual arts there. The thesis also draws from the extensive contemporary publications from the 1940s and 1950s in which the new art of those years was debated, redefined and exhibited, such as *Design Review*, *The Yearbook of the Arts in New Zealand*, and *The New Zealand Listener*. Finally, it draws from the considerable knowledge of Taylor's son, Terence, who was interviewed by the author and made substantial correspondence available to the author, enabling an accurate picture of his father's personality and his work to be portrayed.

In the first chapter, the development of Taylor's early career as an artist is examined, with attention to his close association with fellow artists Russell Clark, Stewart MacLennan and George Woods. These artists had much in common with Taylor in training and experience of art practice, and with him formed a stimulating group that fed into and inspired one another's work. They also provided Taylor with robust debate on contemporary aesthetic ideas, and supported the art practice of one another through the 1940s; difficult years for practicing artists in New Zealand. The influence of Taylor's training and early experience as an artist, and association with his contemporaries Clark, MacLennan and Woods, toward depicting Maori subjects in his prints is demonstrated.

The development of Taylor's personal interest in Maori culture is explored in Chapter Two, establishing exactly which factors caused him to turn to Maori culture, and what aided the development of his sustained interest in Maori throughout his life. His prints on Maori subjects are notable in that they are also products of cultural borrowing. As such, they have a place in the debate over cultural appropriation in art. While this issue arose well after Taylor's death, it is pertinent to modern perception of his work, and thus merits examination in the body of this thesis. His prints are assessed according to the literature pertaining to this issue, in order to gain a clearer perspective of where they are placed in this contentious debate.

Taylor's philosophy and how it underpinned his art are the subject of the following chapter. Beliefs about aesthetics were an important facet of the search for identity in New Zealand during the 1940s and 1950s. Taylor is examined in terms of his place in nationalist and regionalist movements in New Zealand art, and also of his personal philosophy that art should be universal and accessible. How he reconciled these different ideas is also analysed. This provides further context for his works on Maori subjects as an expression of these beliefs.

The culmination of Taylor's beliefs was his project during the 1950s to illustrate George Grey's *Polynesian Mythology And Ancient Traditional History Of The New Zealand Race, As Furnished By Their Priests And Chiefs* (1855). This was the most significant project Taylor adopted during his life, and in Chapter Four it is examined from inception to eventual abandonment. The two major sources of influence on Taylor for this project, Stewart MacLennan's illustrations for *Legend of Maui* (1938), and George Woods' illustrations for *Myths and Legends of Maoriland* (1946), are examined in terms of their contribution to Taylor's venture. The history of *Polynesian Mythology* is also reviewed; what was achieved will be analysed, and what remains incomplete will be assessed. Re-evaluation of *Polynesian Mythology* shows that despite the project's failure, Taylor's experience and study of Maori during the preparation for these engravings was a lasting achievement that informed his printmaking for the rest of his life.

The final chapter discusses the prints Taylor produced on Maori subjects. This does not consist of an exhaustive catalogue. Instead, important and representative works are examined in the context of stylistic groups and themes within his work. Taylor reworked compositions and themes repeatedly in his printmaking, and by examining his work in this manner, their content is better understood. This method of scrutiny will show his development throughout his art, and demonstrate how he constantly refined and reinterpreted his ideas. This method has been deliberately adopted to draw further meaning from his work, something that could not be achieved by a chronological survey of his work.

This thesis shows, above all, that Taylor is important as an artist who broke boundaries in art in his adoption of Maori culture and themes in his art practice. That he was the first New Zealand artist to survive on income from his art without recourse

to teaching is an astonishing achievement when the difficult conditions of the 1940s and 1950s are considered.² Taylor was a pioneer who smoothed the way for future generations of artists to become professionals, and to practice without the stigma that was attached to art in his time.³ By interpreting his prints on Maori subjects through this methodology greater understanding of both them and their context will be reached. His prints are significant in the history of twentieth century New Zealand art, a fact slowly becoming better understood and accepted by the New Zealand art establishment. They are unique both nationally and internationally for their synthesis of Maori cultural elements and superb printmaking skills. This thesis shows they were the logical outcome of his training, philosophy, and experience and draw their strength from his fusion of Maori and pakeha culture. In this he may be regarded as an exceptional New Zealand artist.

² Ibid. p. 72.

³ Terence Taylor recalls one of his schoolteachers calling his father “a parasite on society” for being an artist. Ibid. p. 75.

Chapter One: *The making of an artist: history of the development of Taylor's early career through his close association with Clark, MacLennan, and Woods*

E. Mervyn Taylor's career is exceptional in that he surmounted the conservatism, wartime shortages and economic constraints of the 1930s and 1940s, yet maintained his artistic vision and lifestyle. These difficulties were overcome to eventually receive well-deserved accolades as a consummate artist, designer, and the finest wood engraver this country has yet produced. His formative years contained many of the influential forces that pushed him toward an understanding of Maori culture. This engagement with Maori was exceptional among pakeha artists for the time, as was his subsequent use of Maori subjects in his art. While Taylor's aesthetic was encouraged by many, he had a particularly close affinity with Russell Clark, George Woods, and Stewart MacLennan, who had much in common with him in terms of their training, and of their attitudes about aesthetics. These artists profoundly influenced Taylor's early career, through influences and ideas they exposed him to. He became much greater, however, than the sum of this association as a mature artist, but it is contended here that his early relationship with these artists was a crucial factor in his development, and his choice of Maori subjects. This chapter will examine Taylor's early history alongside these three artists, and explore the forces that shaped their talents and motivated their art collectively. It will examine the body of work generated in their early careers, with special emphasis on use of Maori subjects and motifs that is the overriding theme of this paper.

Taylor, Woods, and Clark underwent similar training regimes during their early careers. All trained in New Zealand and then worked in the commercial arts, which instilled an understanding of graphic design in their work. MacLennan's training followed a slightly different course; as he additionally studied at the Royal College of Art in London, returning to New Zealand in 1938. The emphasis his teachers in London placed on technical understanding of craft, however, meant that he and Taylor in particular had much in common. Taylor's early training was also highly craft based. The influence of initial training on all four moulded them so that they kept

producing works throughout their careers that had a graphic as well as craft bias. This characteristic distinguishes their art from that of their contemporaries.

Born in 1906 in Auckland to Emily and Ernest Herbert Taylor, Ernest Mervyn Taylor attended Grafton School between 1912 and 1920. His schooling was interrupted by bouts of poliomyelitis and rheumatic fever. From an early stage the young Taylor had displayed an aptitude for art, but his parents discouraged him, considering art to be an impractical career path.⁴ After a year in Form Three at Auckland Grammar in 1921, he left to start an apprenticeship in jewellery engraving to the Auckland jeweller W. H. Worrall and Sons.⁵ Taylor's time at Worrall and Sons from 1921 until 1926 was his first step toward a career in printmaking. He was now encouraged in his training by his parents, who felt the apprenticeship a practical choice, and set up a studio for him in the backyard workshop of their Auckland home. During this time, he became a proficient jewellery engraver. In his studio he engraved items for family members as well as cups, bowls and other staple engraving work.⁶ He left Worrall and Sons in 1926 and, although his family wished him to become a jeweller, in 1929 enrolled at the Elam School of Art for one term, taught by Arthur Hipwell.⁷

From around 1930, Taylor worked in window design and advertising for the tobacco merchants W.D & H.O. Wills. In 1935 he transferred to a new job in their Wellington office and here learned the rudiments of poster design.⁸ He also took a printmaking night class at 1936, which was taught by Fred Ellis at the Wellington Technical College. Here he met George Woods, a fellow student at the College.⁹ He married Edelweiss Yeoville Cooke in 1937, and left the employ of Wills. In the same year, he started work for the advertising company Carlton & Caruthers. That year, Taylor made his first foray into wood engraving: the medium with which he later became synonymous. *Dark Valley*, 1937 was a large-scale wood engraving, measuring 189x256mm: an ambitious project for Taylor's first block.¹⁰ He engraved this work with his jewellery engraving tools, as although he had become aware of wood

⁴ T. Mackle, "Taylor, Ernest Mervyn, 1906-64.," in *The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* (Department of Internal Affairs, 2000). p. 509.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ T. Mackle, *Interview: Mrs Teddy Henderson [E. Y. Taylor], 2 November 1987/ Tony Mackle* (1987).

⁷ T. Walker, "E. Mervyn Taylor: A Print History" (Research Paper, University of Auckland, 1982). p.1.

⁸ Ibid. p. 2

⁹ T. Taylor, *Electronic Mail Communication with the Author 10/01/06* (2006).

¹⁰ Walker, "E. Mervyn Taylor: A Print History". p. 7.

engraving as an art form, tools and materials were not readily available at this time.¹¹ At Carlton Caruthers he worked with George Woods and in 1939 the two artists opened a freelance art studio in Willis Street. Much of their work was poster design, particularly for the Majestic Theatre, which was across the street from their studio.¹² Woods was eight years older than Taylor, and had worked for an advertising agency in Sydney until they worked together. Having first trained in art at Wellington Technical College, he then travelled to the United State's West Coast via Tahiti and other Pacific islands. He was fascinated by their cultures. This experience of the Pacific proved a lasting influence on his art, predisposing him to examine Maori culture on his return to New Zealand.¹³

Between 1939 and 1940, Taylor met Clark, who was also designing a stand at the New Zealand centennial exhibition. Clark had much in common with Taylor and Woods. He was born in 1905, and started his art education at the Canterbury School of Art, where he began evening classes in 1922. He first joined an advertising agency in 1928, working for Jewell-Skinner in Christchurch,¹⁴ and then worked as a freelance artist in Dunedin for John McIndoe, a publisher and printer, from 1929. He and his wife relocated to Wellington in 1938, where he worked for two advertising agencies, one of which was Carlton & Caruthers, before obtaining work as an illustrator for a new radio magazine, *The New Zealand Listener* in 1939.¹⁵

Clark's training in Christchurch under teachers such as Francis Shurrock and Archibald Nicholl, and his exposure to the LaTrobe scheme artist Robert Nettleton Field in Dunedin had set a benchmark for quality in his art.¹⁶ Shurrock and Field, had arrived from England in 1923 and 1925 respectively, where at the time influential figures like Eric Gill were asserting the importance of good craft in the arts. Field's and Shurrock's contribution alongside Clark's commercial experience meant that the latter had much in common with Taylor and Woods when they met. Taylor's son

¹¹ Mackle, *Interview: Mrs Teddy Henderson [E. Y. Taylor]*, 2 November 1987/ Tony Mackle.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ T. Mackle, "George Woods (1898-1963)," *Art New Zealand* 1995. p. 89.

¹⁴ N. Roberts, "Clark, Russell Stuart Cedric 1905-1966," in *New Zealand Dictionary of Biography* (Department of Internal Affairs, 2000). p. 105.

¹⁵ M. Dunn, *Russell Clark Retrospective Exhibition. Christchurch 1975*. (Christchurch: Robert McDougall Art Gallery, 1975).

¹⁶ M. Duncan, "Russell Clark: A Sculptural Journey: A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Art History in the University of Canterbury" (unpublished M. A. thesis, University of Canterbury, 2001). p. 19.

Terence, (born in 1942) remembers they were “all good mates”.¹⁷ This was not surprising considering their craft educated and commercial backgrounds, and that they were all working as illustrators in Wellington by 1940.

MacLennan met Taylor between 1935 and 1937, when he worked in Dunedin for W.D. & H.O. Wills, for whom Taylor also worked as a travelling artist.¹⁸ MacLennan was born in 1903. Initially trained at the Dunedin School of Art, he was taught by A.H. O’Keefe, and also R.N. Field,¹⁹ from whom Russell Clark had drawn much inspiration. He later said of these figures: “I have had a series of teachers from whose work and teaching my convictions concerning the basic importance of real craftsmanship have developed.”²⁰ MacLennan extended English influences on his training by studying at the Royal College of Art in London. Here, he was taught by Paul and John Nash, and Eric Ravillious.²¹ He was also particularly influenced by a typography class he took during 1938, taught by J. H. Mason at the London City Council Central School of Arts and Crafts, shortly before returning to New Zealand in 1939. Upon arrival he took a teaching position at Wairarapa College,²² and renewed acquaintance with Taylor, with whom he now shared an interest in wood engraving.²³ MacLennan’s overseas training did not differentiate him from Taylor, Woods and Clark to any great extent. He too had a commercial background, and his education had been influenced by craft philosophy like theirs. This linked their separate interests in printmaking, and eventually led to a number of shared commissions.

As well as being printmakers and graphic artists, the four men were strongly interested in painting and drawing New Zealand’s landscape. Taylor, Clark and MacLennan in particular sketched exhaustively, collecting scenes from around the country. This was a very timely choice, reflecting the growing movement in the early decades of last century of nationalist art.²⁴ For this reason, it is important to emphasise

¹⁷ T. Taylor, *Electronic Mail Communication with the Author*. (02/06/02).

¹⁸ H.V.M., "Commercial Way to Real Art," *Evening Star*, 13/01 1978. (unpaginated clipping).

¹⁹ K. McGahey, *The Concise Dictionary of New Zealand Artists* (Wellington: 2000). p. 157.

²⁰ S. MacLennan, ""Stewart MacLennan"," *Year Book of the Arts* (1948).

²¹ McGahey, *The Concise Dictionary of New Zealand Artists*. p. 157.

²² T. Taylor, "Electronic Mail Communication with the Author.," (09/06/02).

²³ S. MacLennan, *Catalogue of Wood Engravings, Colour Prints, and Drawings by E. Mervyn Taylor* (Wellington: Victoria University College Regional Council of Adult Education/Community Arts Service, c 1953 - 54). (unpaginated)

²⁴ J. Batten, "Art and Identity," in *Culture and Identity in New Zealand*, ed. W. E. Willmott and D. Novitz (Wellington: G. P. Books, 1989). pp. 214 – 215.

their place alongside figures such as William Sutton, Rita Angus, Doris Lusk and Colin McCahon, who chose to paint landscapes that were particular to the New Zealand environment, also influenced by nationalism. The two groups are linked by this shared interest and in other ways as well. Clark ran art classes during the early 1930s in Dunedin that had been attended by Lusk and McCahon.²⁵ Taylor himself exhibited beside McCahon and Sutton with The Group, in 1949.²⁶ Clearly, Taylor, Clark, and MacLennan have a place in the tradition of nationalist landscape painters in this country alongside their contemporaries, Sutton, Angus, Lusk and McCahon. The two groups are bound by their nationalist desire to paint local subjects, and their portrayal of a characteristically New Zealand light.

There is a difference however, between the painted and graphic work of the four artists. The former concentrated on relating the characteristics of individual places, while the latter derived its look from New Zealand culture, style, and the dynamics of pure design. This dichotomy is due in part to the hierarchy of art genres. The graphic arts audience of the time accepted a wider range of subjects and approaches than did the fine arts audience. For the artists, however, the separation was not so pronounced, in that their graphic art was enriched by their empathy with landscape. Taylor regarded understanding New Zealand's land and sea as important because it provided an insight into Maori culture, whose traditions had grown from this environment.²⁷ He would go on to use his understanding of landscape elements in his printmaking and illustration of Maori and indigenous subjects.

Taylor's background and that of his fellow artists was a significant factor in their predilection towards Maori subjects. E. Y. Taylor first influenced her husband toward Maori culture by relating to him Maori stories she recalled from her childhood.²⁸ The process by which Taylor himself came to adopt Maori subjects is discussed in the next chapter, but it is sufficient to say here that after his wife, the greatest source of influence may well have been his circle of artist friends. Each had their connection with Maori culture and interest in it by the time they and Taylor were acquainted.

²⁵ Roberts, "Clark, Russell Stuart Cedric 1905-1966." p. 105.

²⁶ The Group, "The Group Exhibition Catalogue," (1949).

²⁷ Mackle, *Interview: Mrs Teddy Henderson [E. Y. Taylor]*, 2 November 1987/ Tony Mackle.

²⁸ T. Taylor, *Electronic Mail Communication with the Author* 03/06/02 (2002).

Several factors caused Russell Clark to become interested in Maori culture. From the mid 1930s he had begun to use Maori as subjects for his work, for example his carving *Tohunga*, (1935)²⁹ in which the head of a Taranaki Maori is carved in a stylised, art deco manner.³⁰ As well as his growing concern that art should exhibit New Zealand's unique culture, Clark's interest in Maori is likely to have stemmed from a concern with his own genealogy. While not widely known, Clark's mother had been one-quarter Maori, a fact of which Clark was proud.³¹

During the Second World War, Russell Clark became a New Zealand Armed Forces official war artist for the Pacific region. This role took him to Bougainville, the Treasuries, New Caledonia, Guadalcanal, Fiji and the Solomon Islands. Experience of islanders provided an invaluable opportunity for him, as he developed an interest in his own country's indigenous culture.³² His paintings from this period at times depict native peoples, but Clark was kept from a full exploration of these subjects by his primary duty as a war artist to depict the troops. After the war, however, work for the Department of Education reinvigorated these interests. In 1948, he travelled to the North Island primarily to sketch the Tuhoe people for the Department's *School Bulletin*.³³ Records he made of the people of the Ureweras, and also of the Hokianga during this trip generated a number of subsequent drawings, paintings, and sculptures of Maori over the next decade. In 1957, Clark travelled back to the Ureweras to live with Tuhoe for a time.

MacLennan's first significant display of interest in Maori culture took place while he was overseas. Before leaving London in 1939, he participated in a typography class at the London County Council Central School of Arts and Crafts. The outcome of this experience was *Legend of Maui*, a version of those stories derived from George Grey's *Polynesian Mythology* typeset and printed as a class exercise, illustrated with wood engravings by MacLennan, and produced and published in 1938 by the school.³⁴ MacLennan's choice of subject matter for this book was of great importance to Taylor; it demonstrated the possibility of illustrating Maori legends. The steady rise

²⁹ Private Collection, Canada

³⁰ Duncan, "Russell Clark: A Sculptural Journey: A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Art History in the University of Canterbury". p. 19.

³¹ Ibid. p. 104.

³² Ibid. p. 34.

³³ Ibid. p. 40.

³⁴ The subject and quality of the engravings will be further addressed in Chapter Four

in the use of Maori subjects in his work from the time of MacLennan's return suggests he was positively influenced in this direction by MacLennan's book.

The culmination of Taylor, Clark, Woods and MacLennan's training and experience by the mid 1940s was their craft inflected aesthetic philosophy. For Clark and MacLennan, training under the modern teaching of the LaTrobe scheme educators, and in MacLennan's case at the Royal College of Art, had given them a heightened appreciation for craft. For Taylor, his engraving apprenticeship to Worrall and Son gave him the same respect for craft quality. His close association with the others during these years meant that their ideas had become well known to him. This pattern of British influence was significant. As already seen, Taylor took his favourite adage from Clare Leighton. MacLennan was conversant with the work of the British School and, on return from England, would have shared this enthusiasm. Woods was also interested in the British engravers. At their Willis Street studio, he had introduced Taylor to Eric Gill's printmaking and typography.³⁵

Craft was not merely important to the group, it was the cornerstone of their aesthetic philosophy, and communication was the second aim. They believed that with a sound and confident understanding of craft, the artist could communicate their ideas to the viewer without having recourse to words. These notions demonstrate their shared belief that art was a natural process, an outcome of almost Ruskinian belief in truth to nature. In 1948, MacLennan explained: "An art student grows into an artist only as he acquires ... perfect understanding of the materials and tools of his craft. ... A natural style will evolve. This craftsmanship seems to me fundamental to all the arts and crafts."³⁶ Taylor also expressed similar views on the value of artists being practiced in their craft. For example, in a review of the Wakefield Collection exhibition of British printmaking in 1948, he said: "It is hoped that ... artists will "learn" from this show that after all there is something in good, sound draughtsmanship. In comparing the standard of work being done here with that of the British artists ... we are lacking in craftsmanship and imagination."³⁷

³⁵ Mackle, *Interview: Mrs Teddy Henderson [E. Y. Taylor], 2 November 1987/ Tony Mackle.*

³⁶ MacLennan, "'Stewart MacLennan'." p. 28.

³⁷ E. M. Taylor, "The Wakefield Collection," *Design Review* 1948. p. 11.

George Woods, recognised nature as the bottom line for artists, commenting: "I think artists should begin where Nature leaves off."³⁸ These statements demonstrate the strong craft priorities of the group, and their equation of art with nature, rather than human artifice. These values shaped their artwork through their careers.

The experience of all four artists in the commercial arts also shaped their beliefs. All their work was imbued to a greater or lesser extent with dynamic design qualities, accessibility and clarity. But it was difficult for fine artists to support themselves on their fine art alone, or to have time to practice while working commercially to earn a living. Most artists actually survived by teaching as they still do today. While Mackle asserts that Taylor was the first artist in New Zealand to support himself by artwork alone successfully.³⁹ This was certainly never easy for him. He achieved it by doing freelance commercial work for much of his career, balancing this with fine arts, and other projects that he could sell more easily. These included his books of engravings, but also ranged to linoprints of animals for children, and bookplates. For example, his son recalls helping his father package printed Christmas cards to sell at bookshops and galleries during 1950 in order to make ends meet.⁴⁰ MacLennan wrote of him:

E. Mervyn Taylor is one of the few free-lance artists in New Zealand. ... No one could hope to make a living by wood engraving in New Zealand, and he has to be a versatile practitioner He has to undertake jobs that are not entirely to his taste, but such is his integrity that everything he does must satisfy his own fastidious sense of design and fitness.⁴¹

Adaptability was necessary for Taylor's survival, and freelance work allowed him to maintain his independence for most of his career. As MacLennan's comment shows, he still implemented his beliefs in quality of craft, despite the challenges of surviving financially as a freelance artist during the 1940s and 1950s.

For Taylor, and Wellington artists in general, without a few important sources of work such as *The New Zealand Listener*, and the School Publications Branch of the Department of Education, their lot would have been bleaker still. With their pronounced view of the communicative value of art, School Publications attracted

³⁸ G. Woods, "George Woods," *Year Book of the Arts in New Zealand* (1948). p. 104.

³⁹ Mackle, "E. Mervyn Taylor (1906-64)." p. 72.

⁴⁰ T. Taylor, 05/10/01.

⁴¹ MacLennan, *Catalogue of Wood Engravings, Colour Prints, and Drawings by E. Mervyn Taylor*.(unpaginated)

Taylor, Woods, Clark, and MacLennan; the opportunity to communicate to New Zealand children about their culture in the *New Zealand School Journal*, and do so with a degree of artistic quality was irresistible to them. In 1944, Taylor became the first art editor at School Publications, employed by John Ewing at the suggestion of Russell Clark.⁴² He worked full time at this post until 1946. This seemingly short formal involvement was due to his displeasure with the amount of administrative work that the post entailed, and his frustration with bureaucracy.⁴³

As seen, Taylor gravitated to work that allowed him to maintain a degree of independence; he worked when he could from his home at Karori. In 1947 he established a temporary studio there, and subsequently added a purpose built studio in 1949.⁴⁴ Taylor's involvement with School Publications continued. After he resigned as editor, he supplied many illustrations on a freelance basis. The remuneration for these was variable: 10 shillings and sixpence for tailpieces, a guinea for medium sized illustrations, and up to five guineas for colour cover illustrations. Though remuneration was not reliable; a very real difficulty faced by School Publications artists faced was their low priority on the government payroll. Taylor sometimes had to wait up to six months for payment.⁴⁵ Juliet Peter, fellow artist at School Publications confirms Taylor's difficulty: "Mervyn ... had real difficulties in extracting regular payments from the Department of Education- you see, artists were supposed, then, to practise their skills for love, not hard cash!"⁴⁶ Despite these problems, however, School Publications was valuable for Taylor both as a source of income, and a place to experiment with new subjects.

Taylor and the other artists made many illustrations for the journals over a number of years, most of which were freelance contributions. They were all involved in illustrating a series of stories adapted from Grey's *Polynesian Mythology* the *School Journal* printed over several months in 1946. These were significant for the development of Maori themes in Taylor's work, as they included his first ever work on Maori mythology, *How Maui Snared the Sun*. (September 1945) [fig. 1]. His sketching of Maori carvings while working for School Publications was the important

⁴² T. Taylor, *Electronic Mail Communication with the Author* 08/01/06 (2006).

⁴³ T. Taylor, "Interview with the Author 26/07/2002," (2002).

⁴⁴ Walker, "E. Mervyn Taylor: A Print History". p. 3.

⁴⁵ Mackle, *Interview: Mrs Teddy Henderson [E. Y. Taylor]*, 2 November 1987/ Tony Mackle.

⁴⁶ J. Cowan, Correspondence 17/07/02 2002.

source of detail for this project, as well as others. During the two years that he was art editor at School Publications, Taylor also made a number of smaller illustrations, tailpieces, borders and the like that featured observed detail from Maori art. These small studies of carved panels, clubs and canoe sternposts were used in the *School Journal* to delineate stories with Maori content, or simply for decorative purposes.⁴⁷ Illustrations of Maori subjects formed a small fraction of the illustrative work at School Publications. When this is considered against the comparative ignorance of Maori culture in 1940s New Zealand society, even such a small body takes on heightened significance. Taylor and the other artists who worked with Maori content were progressive in this sense and ahead of their time.

An interesting parallel with the activities within School Publications at this time was the appointment of Gordon Tovey as Supervisor of Art and Craft to the Department of Education in 1946. Tovey belonged to a younger generation of people in the Department who had begun to challenge the tradition of formal education methods. He pioneered schemes to make Maori art forms part of the curriculum for all school children, employing young Maori and pakeha artists as art educators to travel to schools teaching Maori crafts and legends. His appointment is an interesting indicator of the groundswell of interest in Maori culture after the Second World War.

New ideas in the Department were not limited to Tovey. There were others working to revise formal traditions of education. Tovey's art teaching schemes were thoroughly supported by the Department's Director of Education, C.E. Beeby.⁴⁸ A young appointment, Beeby had already broken down some of the formality in the Department by the time Tovey's became Art Supervisor.⁴⁹ It is unlikely that Tovey had any direct interaction with Taylor and the other artists while they worked for School Publications, as their interests in Maori art and culture dated from well before his appointment (the same year Taylor resigned as art editor there). However, it is interesting to note that Tovey began his career teaching at the Dunedin School of Art in 1932,⁵⁰ when Russell Clark and Stewart MacLennan were both living in Dunedin,

⁴⁷ As examined in Chapter Two.

⁴⁸ C. M. Henderson, "Tovey, Arthur Gordon, 1901-74," in *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* (Wellington: The Department of Internal affairs, 2000). pp. 523-4.

⁴⁹ C. M. Henderson, *A Blaze of Colour: Gordon Tovey, Artist Educator* (Christchurch, N.Z.: Hazard Press, 1998). p. 90.

⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 53.

the latter studying at the school itself. MacLennan's experience of Tovey possibly encouraged his subsequent use of Maori subjects in contributions for School Publications. Also, years later Tovey employed Cliff Whiting and Paratene Matchitt among his group of Maori art and craft specialists to teach Maori arts in schools through the 1960s. Taylor had earlier come to know both of them well in 1952 while in Te Kaha.⁵¹ Beeby's academic background and liberal attitude probably had larger indirect effect than Tovey on the climate the School Publications Branch worked in. An even greater context for the events within School Publications was the Labour government of the time led by Peter Fraser, who placed great importance in the quality and accessibility of education. Freedom allowed to artists who worked for School Publications at this time was due in part to growing permissiveness in the greater political climate. Without figures such as Beeby in place, the audience Taylor and his fellow artists exposed to Maori subjects through their illustration would have been dramatically smaller. Without the valuable testing ground of the *School Journal*, it is possible they would not have explored these themes further in their own work.

The series of calendars commissioned by Imperial Chemical Industries were another notable project for Taylor. He illustrated one entirely; *Original Wood Engravings by E. Mervyn Taylor*, (1949). On another, *A Series of Polynesian Legends*, (1955) he worked alongside Clark, MacLennan and Woods.⁵² They covered specifically New Zealand subjects such as historical events and Maori mythology. On these projects, as was often the case, Taylor worked alongside other artists who shared their ideas and enthusiasms with him. Through these relationships he came to valuable commissions, and developed the themes of his art for which he became famous.

Another important relationship Taylor had was with The Architectural Centre. The Centre was founded in July of 1946 by a group of Wellington architects and artists, including a number of European emigrants and was loosely modelled after the Bauhaus. Taylor was involved in the founding of the centre, and contributed to its constitution.⁵³ The Centre aimed to encourage design and architecture in Wellington through teaching and sharing ideas, and to revive the building industry, which reeled

⁵¹ Taylor, "Interview with the Author 26/07/2002."

⁵² Taylor's works for both will be discussed in Chapter Five

⁵³ T. Taylor, *Electronic Mail Communication with the Author 22/01/06* (2006).

after the Second World War from a lack of work and material shortages.⁵⁴ Taylor produced its publication *Design Review* through his publishing company The Mermaid Press, until 1952 a task he was coerced into by Dennis Glover.⁵⁵ From the members of the Centre Taylor gained valuable insights into architecture and industrial design. He also secured many commissions for murals from the architects, the execution of which improved his financial security during the 1950s. Taylor made lasting friendships at the centre, with architects such as Gordon Wilson, and Maurice B. Patience. A very social organisation, its members were known for their parties, and the organisation's gallery space also became the home of the Thursday Group, a sketching and exhibiting society of which Taylor was a member. His mutually beneficial association with the Centre enriched his philosophy and broadened his art, contributing during the 1950s to his maturation as an artist.

Taylor remained wary, however, of being described solely as an artist: to him the artist and craftsman were a duality. It would be inadequate, therefore, to concentrate on one facet without exploring the other. His beginnings in a technical apprenticeship ensured that a craft concept was rooted firmly alongside his increasing desire to be an artist as a young man, and it tempered his development. These early years of his career were the time when his technical habits and practices became embedded. While working on the *School Journal*, he was able to put into practice the ideas about art to which he had been exposed. Here he asserted the importance of craft, and of art being able to communicate the artist's sense of identity, by exploring indigenous themes, including Maori culture. This time was a testing ground for the artistic practice of the rest of his life.

Taylor was unique among his contemporaries as the first artist in New Zealand who managed to support himself solely on his art.⁵⁶ His formative years should, then, be recognised for their background struggle to support himself and his family, through times of economic hardship. It is also testimony to his unfailing energy for producing art during this period that he made so many prints. Taylor was fortunate enough to possess a network of friends and fellow artists who encouraged his work and provided

⁵⁴ Architectural Centre (Wellington N.Z.) and City Gallery Wellington., *Cuttings from the Centre: The Architectural Centre Celebrates Fifty Years, 1946-1996: 16 November 1996 to 2 March 1997* (Wellington: City Gallery, 1996). pp. 12-13.

⁵⁵ Mackle, *Interview: Mrs Teddy Henderson [E. Y. Taylor], 2 November 1987/ Tony Mackle*.

⁵⁶ Mackle, "E. Mervyn Taylor (1906-64)." p. 72.

him with a source of valuable commissions. He was just as generous, however, in his support of others, and gave younger artists, such as Cliff Whiting the boost they needed to find that art was a viable occupation. The context of Taylor's fellow artists and their support at the beginning of his career explains the directions of his art in later life. Viewed in context, it is obvious that he thrived on the stimulation of their ideas, and their art practice. But the breadth of Taylor's artistic vision may not be accounted for so easily: his personal motives for exploring Maori art and culture are diverse and intriguing.

Chapter Two: *Meeting of worlds: the generation of Taylor's interest in Maori culture*

A defining feature of Taylor's oeuvre is the inclusion of Maori art and culture in his printmaking. It provided narrative content that was unusual for the time in which he worked, and proved of interest to a growing section of New Zealand society. It expanded the breadth of his art, and enriched his already graphic emphasis with motifs studied from the dynamic design of Maori art. This chapter will explore what initially motivated Taylor's interest in Maori, and how that interest became a substantial interaction with Maori and their culture, personally and in his prints.

As a printmaker, Taylor's relationship to Maori art and culture was unique in his time. Few parallels existed outside the small group of Russell Clark, Stewart MacLennan and George Woods who shared his enthusiasm. What differentiates Taylor from this group, however, is that he engaged both with Maori culture as subject, and Maori art itself, studying and incorporating motifs in his prints. They also depicted Maori subjects in their art, but their art remained unaffected by their experience of Maori motif. Other artists engaged with Maori art outside printmaking during Taylor's life, notably Theo Schoon, Gordon Walters, and Colin McCahon, their means of doing so, however, were different from Taylor's and indeed each other, as will be seen later.

A mark of the success of Taylor's works on Maori subjects was that during his own lifetime he became synonymous with them, a link that continues today. But, in the decades after his death, this link relegated him to a relative obscurity. This was because some critics and historians were not comfortable with Taylor having, as a pakeha artist, represented Maori. It is unfortunate that Taylor's entire oeuvre was neglected, as a result of this. Recently the tide of critical appreciation has turned, and it is now realised that Taylor had been unfairly denied his important place amongst artists of twentieth century New Zealand. To appreciate his place in an art historical context, and to understand better the unique way he engaged with Maori art and culture, therefore, it will be necessary to understand first how Taylor engaged with Maori, their culture, and their art.

During the 1930s, Maori culture was largely separate from that of pakeha in New Zealand society. Lack of acknowledgement of Maori language and socioeconomic

factors contributed to the climate of insularity between pakeha and Maori. Over the next two decades, social and political change began addressing the balance of the relationship. It was through these years that Taylor moved into his mature career as an artist, and became interested in Maori.

According to family sources, Taylor's first introduction to Maori subjects was via his wife, E. Y. Taylor. She was born in Feilding, but had grown up in Wanganui, where she heard numerous stories of Maori legend as a child. Having a fondness for these stories, she naturally encouraged Mervyn to take them up as art subjects during his early career.⁵⁷ He set about reading an edition of George Grey's *Polynesian Mythology and Ancient Traditional History of the New Zealand Race, as Furnished by their Priests and Chiefs* (originally published 1855) as further introduction to them.⁵⁸

Taylor was introduced to Maori mythology through a range of sources. Illustrated collections such as Grey's became one recurring element of exposure, probably appealing to Taylor as a graphic artist and designer, and because of their stories of Maori cosmology. Terence Taylor remembers his father having a pocket edition of *Polynesian Mythology* that he had borrowed from someone at length.⁵⁹ Significantly, Taylor began an extensive set of illustrations for this book during the 1950s that was never completed. E. Y. Taylor recalls in an interview that George Woods' project with Wilhelm Dittmer was also of huge interest to Taylor, that it was the biggest single influence on Taylor toward Maori subjects.⁶⁰ This is certain, though her description of this project is slightly ambiguous. Dittmer (1866 – 1909), was a contemporary of Goldie and Lindauer. He is most well known for his illustrations of his own collection of stories, *Te Tohunga* (1907) and never collaborated with Woods. Rather, A.W. Reed, however, in 1946 published *Myths and Legends of Maoriland*, a collection of stories adapted by Reed from the gamut of Maori mythology, with a self-avowed popular emphasis.⁶¹ In this book, illustrations by Woods and those from Dittmer's *Te Tohunga* appeared together. It is this that E. Y. Taylor refers to.

⁵⁷ Taylor, *Electronic Mail Communication with the Author* 03/06/02 (2002).

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ T. Taylor, *Electronic Mail Communication with the Author* (03/06/02).

⁶⁰ Mackle, *Interview: Mrs Teddy Henderson [E. Y. Taylor]*, 2 November 1987/ Tony Mackle.

⁶¹ A. W. Reed, *Myths and Legends of Maoriland* (Wellington: Reed, 1946). p. 9.

Stewart MacLennan's illustrated version of Grey's *Polynesian Mythology, Legend of Maui*, produced much earlier in 1938, fascinated Taylor for several reasons. The book, made before MacLennan returned to New Zealand, demonstrated to Taylor that Maori mythology was a worthwhile source to draw on. Significantly, it was illustrated with wood engravings; Taylor had begun to experiment with these several years earlier in 1937, but had not taken them up seriously until 1943.⁶² It was produced in the craft inflected conditions under which the British engravers of the 1930s typically produced their own books. The fact that it was a typographical exercise also evokes the whole philosophy, of artist printmakers being directly involved in all aspects of the production of their own work. Eric Gill, the very influential engraver and typographer, was one of the most important exemplars of this in their movement. Paul and John Nash and Eric Ravillious had been amongst MacLennan's teachers in London.⁶³

Undoubtedly, MacLennan's book was the most positive example Taylor had seen by 1939 that illustrating a collection of Maori mythology was feasible, and could be completed with exceptional quality using wood engravings. On his return from England, MacLennan was enthralled by wood engraving, and pleased to find Taylor felt the same. He later explains:

Towards the end of 1939 I returned from England with a set of gravers, a few boxwood blocks, and a great enthusiasm for wood engraving. I knew of no one in New Zealand who had tackled the craft, but within a few days of my arrival I saw a print that was unmistakably from the wood. ... signed E. Mervyn Taylor. I had known Mervyn Taylor well before I went away, but had not suspected his interest in engraving. ... he was in fact suffering incurably from Graveritis.⁶⁴

By virtue of their example, Taylor's close friends, MacLennan and Woods influenced Taylor toward using early collections of Maori stories as a vessel for illustration.⁶⁵

The popularity of such collections ascended from the mid 1940s onwards. Maori stories were becoming a good proposition for publishers, with a public newly interested in New Zealand's national identity, turning away from Britain. Taylor must

⁶² Walker, "E. Mervyn Taylor: A Print History". p. 7.

⁶³ McGahey, *The Concise Dictionary of New Zealand Artists*. p. 157.

⁶⁴ MacLennan, *Catalogue of Wood Engravings, Colour Prints, and Drawings by E. Mervyn Taylor*. (unpaginated)

have encountered a range of such volumes, as they became commonly available during this time. Nonetheless, MacLennan's and Woods' projects were certainly early examples of these compilations, and significant to Taylor's developing his own Maori mythology project.

The close friendship Taylor had with Woods, MacLennan, and Russell Clark, meant such books were also shared and discussed exhaustively at the studio he and Woods shared in Willis Street from 1939. E. Y. Taylor recalled regular animated discussions during lunchtimes in the studio, between Taylor, Woods, and other artists who might have dropped in such as Clark, MacLennan, or Leonard Mitchell. These ranged widely over art, aesthetics, and philosophy, so concerned were the artists about the character and subject matter of their art.⁶⁶

The third factor in Taylor's introduction to Maori art and culture was his work from 1943 to 1944 as an illustrator for *Korero*, a magazine for New Zealand forces abroad, published by the Army Education and Welfare Service during World War Two.⁶⁷ *Korero* depicted life in New Zealand, and during this time Taylor travelled the country, producing a body of illustrations of this. His first well known wood engravings come from this period: a series depicting native birds that he would reproduce examples of frequently throughout his later career as an art editor for School Publications and for several magazines. Experience at *Korero* gave Taylor an interest in representing New Zealand in his art. Its culture, land, and native plants and native life would become the grist of his artistic career, subjects he had far from exhausted when he died in 1964. Walker asserts it was Taylor's travelling experience that gave him the opportunity to see the breadth of New Zealand, and its peoples, ultimately cementing his future as a New Zealand artist.⁶⁸ He had certainly been interested in going to London to practice wood engraving in the 1930s.⁶⁹ Any urges to travel abroad, however, were quelled by his travelling experience working for *Korero*,

⁶⁵ Works of MacLennan's *Legend of Maui* and Reed's *Myths and Legends of Maoriland* are examined in Chapter Four, where their difference from Taylor's for his Grey's *Polynesian Mythology* project is explored.

⁶⁶ Mackle, *Interview: Mrs Teddy Henderson [E. Y. Taylor]*, 2 November 1987/ Tony Mackle.

⁶⁷ D. Horrell, "Natural Themes in the Wood Engravings of E. Mervyn Taylor" (Unpublished B. A. Hons research essay, University of Canterbury, 2001). p. 6.

⁶⁸ Walker, "E. Mervyn Taylor: A Print History". p. 7.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

and Taylor remained resolutely involved with New Zealand subjects for the rest of his life.⁷⁰

Taylor had now resolved the search for subjects that all young artists make, and had decided firmly upon the indigenous plants and animals, and the landscape of New Zealand, on Maori, their art and their culture. Fuelled by interests in representing indigenous subjects, he began to research them. During his time as art editor at the Department of Education's School Publications Unit, between 1944 and 1946, and later when he contributed freelance work, there was an active interest in promoting Maori art and culture in the *New Zealand School Journal*, a publication for schoolchildren.

The art editor position was not without its drawbacks, and Taylor often felt frustrated at its heavy administrative load and by government bureaucracy.⁷¹ Despite this, the unit did have the reputation of being "stimulating" for those who worked in it.⁷² Changing culture at the School Publications unit during the 1940s, and their degree of separation from the Education Department created this environment. Thelma Maurais ran the unit almost autonomously,⁷³ and artist Juliet Cowan (nee Peter) recalls: "I, plus the whole editorial staff were housed in a detached building in Featherston St., and had little to do with the Department itself- (I think this situation suited all of us!)"⁷⁴

There was latitude for he and other artists to illustrate Maori subjects frequently within the *School Journal*. This sea change in the Department reflected growing adoption of Maori culture as a symbol of identity during the 1940s, a nationalistic

⁷⁰ It is an interesting question whether Taylor would have gained the same renown through his career had he practised in Britain. On the one hand, he would have arrived in a very stimulating environment, albeit well after the first flush of the British movement. However, what made Taylor exceptional as an engraver was that he tried, and then dispensed with the British style of wood engraving, and through relative isolation developed a new style that was highly individual.

⁷¹ Walker, "E. Mervyn Taylor: A Print History". p. 3. (This was the reason that he left School Publications in 1946 and went back to independent work and freelancing.)

⁷² J. C. Beaglehole, "Script for E. Mervyn Taylor's Eulogy," (National Gallery Collection, Te Papa Tongarewa Museum of New Zealand, 1964). p. 7.

⁷³ Thelma Maurais is believed to be a senior administrator for the School Publications Branch, but this has not been able to be independently verified. F. L. Combs was the managing editor whom Taylor was directly responsible to. Ibid. p. 7.

⁷⁴ J. Cowan, 2002 17/07/02.

trend.⁷⁵ Maori culture and design was increasingly used as a source for decoration and illustration.⁷⁶ These precedents encouraged School Publications artists to copy motifs and acquire inspiration from Maori and Pacific art. Taylor certainly did spend long hours with the National Museum collections in Wellington, sketching Maori art and artefacts, building up a vocabulary of ideas.⁷⁷ As to exactly when this studying began, Terence Taylor recalls between 1946 and 1947, which precedes Taylor's work for the book *Taina*, that is clearly derived from close studies of Maori artefacts and taonga. He recalls his father making drawings from the war canoe at the Dominion Museum, spending time up on a stepladder drawing the top.⁷⁸ Taylor left his position at School Publications in 1946, but there is some evidence suggesting this kind of drawing from objects took place earlier, before he left. Small drawings of Maori artefact and carved pattern appear frequently in the *School Journal*, uncredited, but obviously in Taylor's style. These tailpieces and decorative borders appear between 1945 and 1946.

His first known work on a Maori mythological subject is the title page *How Maui Snared the Sun* (September 1945) [fig. 1].⁷⁹ This was part of a series of eight cover illustrations in 1946, each preceding the story depicted. Also included were *Kupe and the Octopus* (1946) [fig. 2] by Taylor, *Maui Fleeing the Fire Goddess* by MacLennan, *Rona and the Moon* by Juliet Peter, and *The Fish of Maui*, and *The Fairy Fishermen* by Russell Clark. While the illustrations were made for children, they are particularly interesting when contrasted with later versions produced for a wider audience. This group of illustrations was a testing ground for Maori subjects for Taylor and MacLennan in particular. The two stories of Maui would be reworked a number of times by both artists through their careers.

How Maui Snared the Sun is a dynamic work full of curling forceful line. The figures are drawn with stark lighting to emphasise their muscles as was conventional in illustrative action comics. The sun itself is a very simplified face that makes reference to Maori carving, but consists of a few basic outlines and is, therefore, unsubstantial. By contrast, in the later wood engraving *Maui Taming the Sun*, (1948) [fig. 10] Taylor

⁷⁵ F. Pound, *The Space Between: Pakeha Use of Maori Motifs in Modernist New Zealand Art* (Auckland, N Z: Workshop Press, 1994). pp. 67-68.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ T. Taylor, *Electronic Mail Communication with the Author 21/02/04* (2004).

⁷⁸ T. Taylor, 21/02/04.

⁷⁹ D. o. E. School Publications, *The New Zealand School Journal* 40, no. 1 part II (1946).

developed a much more powerful and legible composition. The sun's rays issue as straight lines moving outward, truncated in places by the bodies of Maui and the other men who strain to tether it. This tension quickly expresses all of the action to the viewer. In this version, the figures of the men have become darker and more suggested, and the face of the sun has acquired a far more convincing countenance, with detail of moko that Taylor had built up a repertoire of through his study of museum carvings.⁸⁰ Early illustrative works for School Publications, such as those for the series of stories adapted from George Grey, did much to firm his direction toward Maori subjects. The most significant early project in this regard was the book illustrations he undertook in 1948 for *Taina*.

Taylor's engravings for *Taina* (1948) by G. M. Henderson were of key importance in confirming his pursuit of Maori subjects as a major theme. *Taina* was his first project on a solely Maori theme. As friend and patron J. C. Beaglehole considered, "probably, it was *Taina* that finally riveted his interest on Maori things."⁸¹ The book was an adaptation of the memoirs of Valentine (Taina) Savage, a rangatira whose father was of English descent. The set of nineteen wood engravings all made between 1947 and 1948,⁸² included full-page illustrations and tailpieces, as well as a number of medium sized works. Full-page engravings followed events in the book to some degree, while smaller works were often made from detail Taylor had studied from Maori carving. There are a number of very nicely composed and executed engravings in *Taina*, some of which make one forget that he had worked in the medium seriously only since 1944.⁸³ *Haoratipa Diving for Crayfish*, or *Crayfish Diver* [fig. 5] as it was later titled independently of the book, is a wonderfully graphic underwater scene, with boldly cut, almost abstract detail, and a nice compositional balance of the diver and the seaweeds and fishes that surround him. The scene owes something to the British wood engravers, as did much of Taylor's earlier work. The swirl of currents evokes the style of Gertrude Hermes, and also suggests a modified composition of Agnes Miller Parker's engraving *The Otter* (1936), from H. E. Bates' book *Down the River* (1937).

⁸⁰ Taylor, *Electronic Mail Communication with the Author*.

⁸¹ Beaglehole, "Script for E. Mervyn Taylor's Eulogy." p. 11.

⁸² T. Taylor, *Electronic Mail Communication with the Author* 20/01/06 (2006).

⁸³ Walker, "E. Mervyn Taylor : A Print History".p.7

Parker's work was a probable source of influence. Two years previously, Taylor had borrowed compositional elements from Parker, whom he greatly admired.⁸⁴

Many of the works in *Taina* were the result of direct study. He made careful drawings to capture detail of carvings and other objects at the Dominion Museum, in the manner he had already done for School Publications work as early as 1945. Of these Taylor commented: "I was pleased to find that when working on *Taina*, Maori design and carving was not beyond the scope of the wood block."⁸⁵ Of the illustrations in *Taina*; *War Canoe* [fig. 6], *Koruru* [fig. 13], *Pataka, Carved Figure from Pou-tokomanawa* [fig. 7], *Shark's Tooth Knife* [fig. 14], *Figure from Carved Lintel* [fig. 11], and *Head from Carving* [fig. 12] are clearly the result of close observation and study.

In a few cases, the exact source of Taylor's study for these works may be found. As mentioned previously, Taylor studied a war canoe at the Dominion Museum between 1946 and 1947. This was the basis for the engraving *War Canoe*. The war canoe, or waka taua, was *Teremoe*, from Wanganui, which was gifted to the Dominion Museum by the Hipango family, and transferred there from Wanganui on 21st February 1930. New panels were added, and the ornately carved sternpost, which appears prominently in Taylor's engraving, originated in the Horowhenua.⁸⁶ His engraving of *Teremoe* is a competent work, in which he makes reference to the sternpost of the waka by providing echoes of its patterns in water eddies, and demarcates the composition with foliage and figure detail in spare white line on predominant black ground. The sternpost forms the right side of the frame, creating a sense of motion with its spiral motifs, despite their remaining contained by an unbroken edge. Another such case is *Carved Figure From Pou-tokomanawa*. This engraving is not so closely detailed as *War Canoe*, but from the shape of the figure, its elongated form, and the placement of its hands on its stomach, it is obvious that Taylor derived it from study of *Centrepost figure, Poutokomanawa*, [fig. i]. Made by Arawa from the Bay of Plenty area, this work also resided in the Dominion Museum at the time Taylor was studying carvings.

⁸⁴ Horrell, "Natural Themes in the Wood Engravings of E. Mervyn Taylor". p. 19.

⁸⁵ E. M. Taylor, "'E. Mervyn Taylor'," *The Yearbook of the Arts in New Zealand* 1947. pp. 117 – 118.

⁸⁶ *Online Learning Resources - Teremoe* (Te Papa Tongarewa Museum of New Zealand, 2005 12/11 2005); available from <http://www.tepapa.govt.nz/TePapa/English/Learning/OnlineResources/SGR/Teremoe.htm#>.

In the engravings for *Taina*, detail of the carvings is often fairly generalised, or modified from original sources. Outside contours are emphasised sometimes to the detriment of incised detail, especially in *Carved figure from Pou-tokomanawa* and *Koruru*. It was not Taylor's intent, however, to describe the carvings with total accuracy.⁸⁷ They were always intended to be figurative designs, and to this extent the detail of carvings was subsidiary to Taylor's printmaking considerations. To this extent, curve work required a greater degree of control and care. To depict internal detail of carvings with absolute accuracy would have made them time consuming subjects, and the rush to publish *Taina* constrained Taylor's time for detailed work severely.⁸⁸ It is clear also that during this project, Taylor was still experimenting with the integration of this source material, and some examples of the work achieve this better than the others, such as *War Canoe*, and *Shark's Tooth Knife*.

Not all the works in *Taina* depicting Maori subjects derived from the study of Maori artefacts. The composition of *Girl Feeding Tapu Chief* (1948) [fig. 8], is obviously derived from European art, most probably Gottfried Lindauer's well known *The Tohunga under Tapu* (c 1902).⁸⁹ *Girl Feeding Tapu Chief* reverses the composition of the other work, but the scene is very similar: that of a girl feeding a tohunga with a stick, who is seated in front of a low whare. The carved detail on the whare is very generically rendered, appearing to have no observed basis in its design.

Taylor's talent for composition is the reason the engravings for *Taina* are successful as a body of work, despite individual variation in quality. The compositions throughout are of a high standard, and indeed the engravings transcend the text itself, as the text is somewhat second rate, and was reviewed as such at the time of publishing.⁹⁰ It does, however, delve into Maori culture, and uses Maori words frequently throughout the book, also providing a glossary. To this extent, it fit well with Taylor's nationalist interests in promoting Maori culture. His engravings for *Taina* are the most concrete early expression of his interest in Maori, which deepened over the following decade. They showcase his belief that New Zealand artists should

⁸⁷ T. Taylor, *Electronic Mail Communication with the Author* 09/06/02 (2002).

⁸⁸ Beaglehole, "Script for E. Mervyn Taylor's Eulogy," p. 10.

⁸⁹ However, as Lindauer's work was in Auckland Art Gallery's collection, and Taylor was based in Wellington while making *Girl Feeding Tapu Chief*, the very similar watercolour *Tapu* (1863 or 1864) by Horatio Gordon Robley is a most likely source. This was in the collection of the Alexander Turnbull Library at this time.

⁹⁰ F. Fyfe, "Reviews," *Design Review* 1949. vol. 3, no. 1. pp.10-11.

adopt indigenous subjects, if sometimes not so elegantly as his later works would. *Taina* was, in this sense, the perfect vessel, and is a precedent for his project to illustrate Sir George Grey's *Polynesian Mythology* several years later.

Taylor's study and use of designs from carvings, was encouraged around 1950 by members of the Ngati Poneke Maori Club,⁹¹ a vibrant Maori cultural group formed at Port Nicholson in 1937 by Kingi Tahiwī.⁹² The idea behind Ngati Poneke was to provide a place for urban Maori to assemble in Wellington regardless of tribal affiliations, removed as they were from their own marae. The club was involved in everything from religion and music, to sporting and cultural events, and it was a testimony to its spirit of inclusiveness that pakeha like Taylor were welcome as members. In fact, Taylor had already been a member of the Polynesian Society before the war, when it was active in the Turnbull Library,⁹³ but the experience with Ngati Poneke would have been something entirely different. According to his son, it was here he began learning Maori language. His ambition was to converse with Maori elders, although sadly he never fully realised that level of fluency.⁹⁴ His desire to learn Maori related to his interest in Maori traditional stories and mythology, and he certainly would have gained a respect for Maori oration at Ngati Poneke, where performances and events were commonplace. Taylor also made friends like Bill Ngata at Ngati Poneke, who gave him lessons in Maori language, and told him stories of the mythology.⁹⁵ The group was "flattered" that Taylor should take such an interest in their culture.⁹⁶ His friends at Ngati Poneke, in particular one of the Bennett brothers, encouraged him in his use of their culture in his work.⁹⁷ Taylor felt, and expressed to friends at Ngati Poneke, that by drawing from Maori art he was making a new kind of art, which expressed the identity of New Zealanders much better than did stylistic recourse to Britain. This work was a true synthesis; Taylor married his technique as a printmaker and graphic artist with Maori art motifs, producing something different from either tradition.

⁹¹ Taylor, "Interview with the Author 26/07/2002."

⁹² R. M. T. Waaka, *Tahiwī, Kingi Te Ahoaho 1883 - 1948* (Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, 7 July 2005 2005 [20/11 2005]); available from <http://www.dnzb.govt.nz>.

⁹³ Mackle, *Interview: Mrs Teddy Henderson [E. Y. Taylor], 2 November 1987/ Tony Mackle*.

⁹⁴ T. Taylor, "Interview with the Author," (26/07/2002).

⁹⁵ Taylor, *Electronic Mail Communication with the Author 21/02/04*.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

There is another, more practical reason Taylor found affinity with Maori motifs in his prints. Taylor had a vocabulary of technique in common with Maori carvers. So far, he has been examined solely as a printmaker, but this understates the important fact that he turned to carving in his later career. There are, of course, elements in common between the mediums and the skills required to work on them. As a trained jewellery engraver, he had progressed to fine art wood engravings, the art form for which he became renowned during his lifetime. The wood engraver uses the graver to incise a negative design from the prepared block. Interplay between positive and negative becomes crucial in the composition, creating balance in the finished print. The block is divided into zones of pattern to render the different tonal effects. Even when working in a figurative style, the engraver is compelled to use repetitive patterns to build up a composition. These features all have their parallels in Maori carving technique. The division of surface into areas of infill pattern in particular is a familiar characteristic of Maori carving. While the outcome of the wood block printing process is quite removed from the end result of the carver, the block itself retains much in common. Taylor learned initially about graphic treatment of surface pattern in his engraving from the example of British artists such as Gertrude Hermes and Agnes Miller Parker. He was, however, only able to fully realise his signature style of integrated pattern in engraving through his experience of Maori art. As a result, the later works of his career displayed a graphic tightness in their compositions, because his treatment of zones of surface pattern was perfectly resolved.

Exploration of Maori motifs was not limited to Taylor's prints. In a rare example of carving wood in the Maori style, Taylor made *Pare Figure* [fig. 29] in 1961 for the North Island Motor Union building (designed by his friend Maurice Patience, who commissioned the work).⁹⁸ An original was carved from totara, then later cast in bronze. *Pare Figure* itself is simple and relatively unadorned, but a competent work, in which Taylor pays careful attention to the facets of the head and comfortably integrates spirals and other motifs into the design. This unique work illustrates the importance of Taylor's work outside printmaking, to provide context for his prints, and shows that his gains from Maori art were significant ones. Also, *Pare Figure*

⁹⁷ Ibid. (Though it is unknown which of the Bennett brothers this refers to, it could certainly have been Charles Bennett, who was in the Maori Battalion, and is well known for his close association with Ngati Poneke.)

⁹⁸ T. Taylor, *Electronic Mail Communication with the Author* 24/02/04 (2004).

confirms that he had a strong interest in the exploration of Maori motif, as well as Maori subjects. Works such as *Pare Figure* do, however, occupy an uneasy place in art history.

In New Zealand, theoretical debate over cultural appropriation in art has centred on the borrowing of Maori motifs for use outside the sphere of Maori culture. Parallel discourses have evolved in most former colonial countries, and the issues are similar. The debate focuses not only on the legitimacy of artistic borrowing, but has a strong component of ethics; some forms of appropriation have done indigenous peoples disservice through misrepresentation or trivialisation of their culture. Opinion on this controversial issue ranges widely, but in the New Zealand context it has centred fundamentally on these two questions. Firstly, is it possible or ethical to restrict the use of motifs according to traditional uses, or the wishes of their originators? Secondly, what kind of actions if any can be performed to make appropriations positive? It is important also to understand that each appropriative action by artists, either Maori or Pakeha, has different consequences, dependent on the context of the borrowing.

To place Taylor's use of Maori art and culture, he must be examined against other well known pakeha artists such as Theo Schoon, Gordon Walters, and Colin McCahon, who are known for appropriation from Maori art and its tradition. Each had their own context for borrowing from Maori. As demonstrated, Taylor became engaged with Maori culture. Through study of it and an interest in promoting it as a facet of New Zealand identity, he interpreted Maori subjects for a wider New Zealand audience than had previously been aware of them. His work was a hybrid of subjects and influence from Maori culture, interpreted through his own background in printmaking and the graphic arts. Works such as *Pare Figure* are anomalous within the art of his career, in that his art was normally a synthesis.

By contrast, Schoon had a modernist, and at times self-consciously primitivist interest in Maori art. Schoon studied Maori art closely, documenting rock drawings, and also contributed to the revival of gourd carving as an artform. Schoon's appropriation is popularly considered one of the most favourable to Maori, as he researched carefully, was taught how to carve by Pine Taiapa, the master carver, and adhered closely to

traditional idioms of carving in this medium.⁹⁹ Schoon also developed designs in Maori style based on koru motifs that were contributed to *Te Ao Hou: The New World*, magazine of the Department of Maori Affairs, and used in his own painting. Walters was a fellow contributor to *Te Ao Hou*. During the 1950s and 1960s, he explored Maori motifs in the magazine as design devices and illustrations. In his painting, he used Maori motifs as part of a programme of modernist abstraction. McCahon had also begun a programme of abstraction, and through the 1960s, he incorporated Maori subjects, language and motifs into some of his paintings as a reflection of his nationalist sentiments. McCahon, shared a feeling with Maori for the land, and wished to acknowledge their role in the history and culture of New Zealand.

There are two important arguments to answer in relation to Taylor's work and appropriation. Those of Francis Pound, and Rangihiroa Panoho. Taylor was never directly critically accused of appropriation, but in one case was denigrated in order to make Walters' and Schoon's use of Maori motifs appear more legitimate. Pound's criticism of Taylor's work in *Te Ao Hou* in *The Space Between: Pakeha use of Maori motifs in Modernist New Zealand Art* (1994), was that his integration of Maori motif into his work was not complete, and that his depictions of Maori subjects remained figurative. For Pound, as a modernist critic this was anathema. He unkindly described Taylor's work as "Western realist ... untouched by Maori style even in their depictions of Maori subjects ... [and] primitive picturesque."¹⁰⁰ Pound's context for this was describing the new editorial regime of Margaret Orbell at *Te Ao Hou* from 1962. Orbell, Walter's wife, had favoured the work of Walters and Schoon over Taylor and Russell Clark, and during her editorship their art disappeared from the pages of the magazine.¹⁰¹ Pound's view was revisionist in that only those artists who he viewed as progressive ie: modernists such as Schoon and Walters, were praised for engaging with Maori culture and art. His criticism of Taylor branded Taylor's borrowing as illegitimate and insensitive. This was because it was done within the framework of figurative art, which Pound viewed as regressive.

Pound's criticism was flawed on two counts. Firstly, it was heavily loaded with the vested interest Pound had in differentiating the younger modernists Walter's and

⁹⁹ R. Panoho, "Maori: At the Centre, on the Margins," in *Headlands: Thinking through New Zealand Art*, ed. R. e. a. Leonard (Sydney, N.S.W.: The Museum, 1992). pp. 133 – 134.

¹⁰⁰ Pound, *The Space Between: Pakeha Use of Maori Motifs in Modernist New Zealand Art*. p. 133.

Schoon from older figurative artists such as Taylor. This was not an argument against Taylor as much as a wilful substitution of Walters and Schoon. From Pound's dogmatic position, Taylor was guilty simply by virtue of being a representational artist. Pound's assumption was that all artists working in New Zealand before modernism secretly aspired to its objectives but were unable to achieve them; they were regressive. This was simply false. His criticism of artists such as Taylor who chose to respond to Maori culture with figurative art, and not abstraction, provided no justification for their rejection. It provided no basis to recommend one style over the other, except for evaluative claims. The second flaw in Pound's criticism of Taylor was that he was willing to praise Walters for drawing attention to Maori art in his artwork,¹⁰² while awarding Taylor none of the equivalence due him for doing exactly the same decades before. Despite their different styles, there were similarities in the careers of both artists, for example, both produced Maori influenced artwork for government publications, and in the case of *Te Ao Hou*, their contribution had even overlapped. Arguably both had in part adopted Maori elements in their work as an outlet of nationalist sentiment. Pound's distinction between the two is artificial, as was his criticism of Taylor's borrowing.

Pound's arguments in defence of Schoon and Walters in *The Space Between*, were written in response to a 1992 essay by Rangihiroa Panoho, in which Panoho made a critique of a centrist view of Western art.¹⁰³ He argued a case for "Maori to resume control, re-establish boundaries for appropriation, and move taha Maori (things Maori) back to the centre."¹⁰⁴ This important work in the appropriation debate responds to both questions posed earlier. He suggested appropriation could no longer be acceptable to the extent to which it had been so far been, and that there were some attenuating circumstances for appropriation, going on to provide an appraisal of the artists previously mentioned, McCahon, Schoon and Walters, amongst others.

Panoho's assessment of these pakeha artists was that their appropriation from Maori was to an extent, legitimised by the care and time the individual artists had taken to understand their source, their acknowledgement of it, and what they had given back to Maori. By this criteria, Panoho treats Schoon and McCahon favourably, as both had

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid. p. 148.

¹⁰³ Panoho, "Maori: At the Centre, on the Margins." p. 133.

engaged Maori culture directly to gain their source material. Of Walters, however, Paonoho disapproves for his refusal to acknowledge the cultural meaning of Maori motif from kowhaiwhai painting when it was employed in his work. Panoho does not speak of Taylor directly, referring as he was to the appropriations of a later group of artists. But we may infer from Panoho's argument Taylor's place in relation to his views.

Panoho contended that borrowing of some pakeha artists was acceptable because they were sensitive to Maori culture, and gave back as much as they took in the interaction. Taylor occupies a similar position to McCahon in this assessment. Although very different in their modes of expression, McCahon and Taylor were contemporaries, and shared similar views about the land, both being influenced by regionalist painting. They also both had nationalist sympathies, and believed Maori culture deserved a place in the equation of national identity.¹⁰⁵ This is why both artists called attention to it in their art. By this interpretation of Panoho's view, Taylor shared the place of McCahon and Schoon, as some of "a small number of Pakeha artists [who] have returned their own mihi (acknowledgement) to Maori art in their work. To them Maori culture has offered broader possibilities in expressing their own identity in Aotearoa".¹⁰⁶

As seen, the second part of Panoho's argument is that appropriation from Maori should cease, and that Maori artists should reclaim the representation of Maori culture.¹⁰⁷ This needs to be challenged, as it founders on a widely misunderstood point; there is a difference between the question of pakeha artists choosing Maori as the subject of art, and speaking on behalf of Maori. While both are commonly coined as "representation", there is significant difference. Panoho conflates these notions, and uses the ethical stance that Maori should determine the manner in which they are represented, to justify the view that it is no longer legitimate for pakeha artists to borrow from Maori culture. This effectively relegates all appropriation to history.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. p. 124.

¹⁰⁵ Pound, *The Space Between: Pakeha Use of Maori Motifs in Modernist New Zealand Art*. pp. 90-91. McCahon turns to Maori as a subject in his work in the early 1960s, in response to nationalist discourse, particularly in poetry.

¹⁰⁶ Panoho, "Maori: At the Centre, on the Margins." p. 127.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. p. 124.

It is contended here that this argument is ill founded, as it does not recognise the very natural relationship that all artists have with the subjects around them. Artists portray subjects that are a part of their environment. To this extent, artistic appropriation is a natural element of art practice in any culture.¹⁰⁸ This was as true of Maori artists who appropriated European figurative designs for use in moko in the nineteenth century, as it was for Taylor years later. When Panoho made the claim that appropriation should stop, he denigrated artists such as Taylor, McCahon, Walters and Schoon. The assertion that these artists were somehow speaking on behalf of Maori is simply false. These artists were certainly trying to draw attention to Maori, yet their work remained their own, a synthesis of the elements of both cultures, produced through their unique backgrounds and techniques. Panoho's motives are ethically sound. That Maori artists should acquire a new primacy in New Zealand, and be able to represent their culture to New Zealand society is completely desirable; particularly in light of the lack of Maori artists who were able to do so before the 1950s. But this is in no way a justification for denying pakeha artists the possibility of engaging Maori culture in their work.

Dick Frizzell's *Tiki* series of paintings in 1992 was a statement of defiance against Panoho and those who would impose such boundaries on artists. Frizzell recalls in 2005: "I knew what the argument was - that culture could only flow one way. That's why I did it, because that's wrong".¹⁰⁹ Much is said about the appropriation issue in the catalogue for Frizzell's exhibition. Hamish Keith asserts that appropriation is a natural part of art practice:

The confusion between how cultures *arrived* at where they are and *what* they are persists. Maori art can thus be cherished for difference and applauded for its evolution by appropriation, while pakeha art is not allowed the one and abhorred for the other. Yet all cultures are different and all that still live, evolve by appropriation.¹¹⁰

Another pertinent point is made by Stuart A. McKenzie, in his response to Ian Wedde's scathing essay on appropriation: *Talking to the Wounded Chief: Augustus*

¹⁰⁸ D. Frizzell and Gow Langsford Gallery (Auckland N.Z.), *Dick Frizzell: "Tiki": 1992 Exhibition, Gow/Langsford Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand* (Auckland: Gow/Langsford Galleries, 1992). p. 6.

¹⁰⁹ Designers Institute of New Zealand., *Prodesign: The Magazine for Professional Designers and Their Clients; Official Journal of the Designers Institute of New Zealand*, vol. Feb/March (Auckland, N.Z.: Associated Group Media, 2005).(unpaginated photocopy).

¹¹⁰ Frizzell and Gow Langsford Gallery (Auckland N.Z.), *Dick Frizzell: "Tiki": 1992 Exhibition, Gow/Langsford Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand*. p. 6.

Earle and Gordon Walters (1990). Referring to Wedde's contention that Maori are "silenced" by appropriation, McKenzie asserts:

... silencing can give way to speech. To ignore this possibility can in fact reinforce the silencing. It is to make at least three assumptions which might now be resisted. It presupposes, first, a fixed Maori identity independent of representation and therefore static. Secondly it assumes that there are ideas, vocabularies, technologies that remain the property of Pakeha, such as formal and technical conventions of contemporary art. Finally it implies that Maori culture lacks the vitality to contest the ways in which it is represented. Overall, it buys into the late nineteenth century view that Maori are a failing culture.¹¹¹

McKenzie thoroughly answers the arguments of Panoho in this statement, and throws back the challenge to him to admit that Maori is a living culture, so may not be defined in predetermined ways. In talking of "speech", McKenzie draws attention to the large number of artists since the 1950s who have responded to the challenge of speaking *for* Maori. Artists such as Ralph Hotere, Cliff Whiting, Paratene Matchitt, Selwyn Muru, and Emily Karaka, with unique voices, have interpreted Maoritanga in fresh ways, nuanced with the meanings Panoho rebuked Walters for abstracting out of his work.¹¹² They have also had European academic art education, and respond to the western art tradition in new ways. These artists live in two worlds, but these worlds are far closer, and more accessible to each other than in Taylor's time.

It is due in part to the interest of people such as Taylor that this situation has changed. His son suggests: "from the interest Mervyn and others took, such as Tovey, the next generation of artists, Whiting, Matchitt, Muru, etc, had a platform to develop from in their own directions."¹¹³ A point echoed by Cliff Whiting, in his description of the experience of being an artist-educator for Gordon Tovey in the 1950s:

...they then brought young Maori people like myself ... and working in conjunction with Pakeha we developed ... a Maori course. That really set the challenge. ... to run in-service training courses for teachers, so that ... Maori children in particular, would have the opportunity to engage in their own culture and their own arts and crafts.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Ibid. p. 12.

¹¹² Panoho, "Maori: At the Centre, on the Margins." p. 131.

¹¹³ Taylor, *Electronic Mail Communication with the Author 21/02/04*.

¹¹⁴ C. Whiting, "Te Po, Te Whaiao, Te Ao Marama: From out of the Darkness, the Word of Being to the World of Light," in *Headlands, Thinking through New Zealand Art*, ed. R. e. a. Leonard (Sydney, NSW: The Museum, 1992). p. 119.

Making this contribution was a reassuring outcome for Taylor's use of Maori themes and motifs. Obviously engagement of cultures on these terms could be beneficial for all parties involved.

In conclusion, Taylor's interaction with Maori culture was fundamentally positive. He invested considerable time and effort to learn about Maori, and chose to work on Maori subjects out of respect, and heartfelt appreciation for the richness he perceived. He wished to draw popular attention to Maori culture, but never prescribed an understanding for his audience to come to. He used Maori motifs and subjects in his work not in an effort to speak for Maori, but in order to create an art that expressed his own identity as an artist craftsman, and a New Zealander. The resulting work is clearly not based on selfish principles and may not be branded appropriative in the derogatory sense. It was a new art in its time, and remains a thought provoking synthesis of cultures today. This is what Taylor intended. M.B. Patience explained after his death that Taylor "saw our ultimate culture as a fusion of that of the two races".¹¹⁵ In examining the evolution of Taylor's interest in Maori culture, we have seen it encouraged by the shared interest of other artists, and by Maori he knew. We will now examine him in terms of his identity as an artist, and what his principles of identity were.

¹¹⁵ M. B. Patience, "'Emigravit', Ernest Mervyn Taylor, 1906-1964," *Journal of the New Zealand Institute of Architects* 31, no. 7 (1964). p. 217.

Chapter Three: *Nationalist and local influence: art as identity*

Mervyn Taylor and his art have been passed over for thorough historical scrutiny because he did not fit easily into one critical framework. He had a threefold division in his motives for choosing subjects and modes of their depiction. He was at once a universalist, a nationalist, and a regionalist in his artwork and philosophy. During his lifetime, Taylor melded all three ideas into an integrated aesthetic philosophy. Understanding Taylor is to accept that such seeming contradictions were quite possible, and that simultaneously working from different perspectives enriched his printmaking and work in other media; imbuing it with the quality that attracts interested audiences even today. He integrated these three aspects of his philosophy by founding them on a basic belief in craft, which remained his most defining characteristic as an artist. He applied his aesthetic beliefs successfully, in doing so creating an oeuvre that engages with New Zealand, and yet he placed his art also within the international context of aesthetics and craft. This is an enduring achievement for any artist.

Taylor was not an outspoken figure in public, but he was sufficiently involved in discourse about making art in New Zealand that his views were thoroughly tested by fellow members of the arts community. The strength of philosophical convictions gave his work depth. It provided continual motivation and enabled him to adapt his ideas to a range of different media in his career. These beliefs drove him to perceive the richness of Maori culture, at a time when it was not well known to pakeha. Its wealth of inspiration was realised by him in a body of work that demonstrates his passion for Maori culture, shown through his consummate skill and feeling as an artist. The composition of Taylor's philosophy is the subject of discussion in this chapter, as is how philosophical beliefs influenced him to choose Maori themes.

During his mature career, Taylor developed a democratic view of art practice. He found affinity with all artistic disciplines. His universalist view encompassed every field of the arts and crafts, and he was always ready to embrace the common points between all artists. As a printmaker, trained as an engraver, he was acutely interested in techniques, and although he remains best known for his wood engravings, experimented with etchings, aquatints, linocuts and other forms. Working in many

other media, he became a talented painter, sculptor and muralist. He followed movements in international art, such as the British wood engravers, voraciously reading art magazines and buying imported books on the arts where he could find them, even through the years of rationing and shortages surrounding the Second World War.¹¹⁶ He had a lively interest in the arts in Wellington also, and was a founding member of The Architectural Centre,¹¹⁷ a society of professional artists and architects whose membership contained Europeans such as architect Helmut Einhorn. At the Centre, Taylor experienced the atmosphere of Modernist ideas and Bauhaus influenced philosophy that had lead to its inception. New Zealand architects too were among his friends there, including M. B. Patience and Gordon Wilson. In his obituary for Taylor in 1964, Patience said of when they first became acquainted, "I also began to appreciate his deep interest in architecture. He loved our profession and one could guarantee that if he were in architectural company, discussion would soon turn to the artist's role in buildings... . He saw the architectural profession as the mother of the arts".¹¹⁸ Taylor deeply respected architecture because it was a discipline that required thorough consideration of the practical elements of building before factors like style could be brought to bear on the design. It is an indicator of how much the Centre stimulated him that between 1949 and 1952 he worked as layout editor of *Design Review*, the Centre publication.¹¹⁹ He was always very busy with freelance design and engraving work throughout his life, due to the pressures of earning enough to support his family, yet Taylor expended considerable effort on *Design Review*.¹²⁰ This benefited Taylor in the form of advertising and exposure for his work, and also by involving him more closely in the debates of art and architectural theory the publication contained.

Taylor's interest in the arts was certainly very eclectic, yet his choice of the print medium also influenced his universalist view of art. Through apprenticeship as a jewellery engraver and early years learning printmaking, he was instilled with a foundation belief in the importance of good craft in any medium. The lessons of

¹¹⁶ Mackle, *Interview: Mrs Teddy Henderson [E. Y. Taylor]*, 2 November 1987/ Tony Mackle.

¹¹⁷ Taylor, *Electronic Mail Communication with the Author* 22/01/06.

¹¹⁸ Patience, "'Emigravit", Ernest Mervyn Taylor, 1906-1964."

¹¹⁹ Mackle, "E. Mervyn Taylor (1906-64)." p. 74.

¹²⁰ Taylor had become involved in other projects during this time that had consumed much of his energy and never adequately payed off, such as several poetry collection projects Denis Glover had cajoled him into at the Caxton Press.

discipline, and the worth of technical ability, became as important to Taylor as the more emotive intangibles of art: expression, movement and feeling. He was never such a technician as to eschew these latter qualities, but his art was always careful and planned, with a backbone of structure behind the expressive elements of theme and depiction. Through all his work he held technique and theme in equilibrium, as he considered that artistic quality was dependent on a balance of ideas and their expression with solid technique, a result of his fundamental craft emphasis. Taylor and his close circle of artist friends viewed craft as the first principle, without which art could not communicate with its audience. MacLennan wrote in 1948:

The craftsmanship decides the quality of the work...An art student grows into an artist only as he acquires more and more perfect understanding of the materials and tools of his craft...this craftsmanship seems to me fundamental to all the arts and crafts. It is not possible to think clearly in terms of form, design, or colour apart from the materials in which these things are to be rendered or the tools with which they will be worked.¹²¹

This emphasis on achieving clarity through sound craft understanding and practice was important, as it enabled Taylor and his fellow artists to speak through their work.

He and his fellow artist's experiences with the *New Zealand School Journal*, *The New Zealand Listener*, and other print media, as well as in commercial graphic art, confirmed for them the importance of communication with an audience. Despite having made changes in medium and style, Taylor believed in the importance of communication his whole life, saying in an interview the year he died, "I think a work of art must speak for itself".¹²² He understood that it was essential to figurative art for theme and iconography to be understood visually, and as such, craft quality was the means to communicate clearly. However, he resisted the temptation to suggest that art should instruct or communicate didactically, asserting, "creation is intuitive and so in my view is any message that art conveys".¹²³ Taylor suggests here a natural process of communication through art, and that it was enough to bring his subjects to the attention of the viewer, and allow them to draw their own conclusions. This philosophy was a crucial factor in the success of his depictions of New Zealand subjects. Because Taylor resisted didacticism, local subjects he wished to draw

¹²¹ MacLennan, "'Stewart MacLennan'." p. 28.

¹²² L. Newick, "An Artist Who Calls Himself a Craftsman," *New Zealand Women's Weekly* 1964. p. 8.

¹²³ Ibid.

attention to become universal and accessible. For this reason his work was well received when he showed overseas during the 1950s, and his engravings popular with the foreign diplomats in Wellington.¹²⁴

The aim of figurative artists of Taylor's generation to communicate through their art is a factor that should mitigate their critical appraisal today. These artists such as he were able to imbue their work with universal qualities just as the abstract artist did, despite their very disparate goals and end products. Without engaging in evaluative comparisons between abstract and figurative styles, it is still important to understand this critical division is an artificial one, and that these artists were contemporaries, though separated thematically. Taylor shared exhibition space with modernist artists including McCahon at "The Group" show in 1949.¹²⁵ As examined before in Chapter Two, it is an unfortunate error to evaluate figurative art according to criteria developed for abstract art; one made all too frequently since the 1970s.

Juliet Batten has characterised the problem of identity in art thus: "There is no one search for identity in art, no one 'New Zealand identity', for the frontiers of that identity are forever shifting".¹²⁶ In trying to redefine New Zealand identity from its association with Britain, the nationalist movement grew in this country during the early decades of the twentieth century. Because of an association between Taylor and nationalism, his reputation has perhaps suffered over the decades since his death. The shifting frontiers that Batten described have unfortunately left little room for or interest in this important step in the development of art in this country.

Nationalist thinking and debate commenced in New Zealand society after the Great War, and was even more prevalent in the years following World War Two.¹²⁷ New Zealand's inhabitants were redefining national and cultural identity, reacting against previous identification with Britain, which was as pronounced in the arts as in other sectors of society. New Zealand artists such as Taylor were reacting against the methods and manners of English academic art that had pervaded this country since its settlement. The feeling of unrest, and the apparent inappropriateness of these traditions drove artists toward informal exhibiting societies, and to depict subjects of

¹²⁴ Beaglehole, "Script for E. Mervyn Taylor's Eulogy." p. 14.

¹²⁵ The Group, "The Group Exhibition Catalogue." (1949).

¹²⁶ Batten, "Art and Identity." p. 213.

¹²⁷ Ibid. p. 214.

New Zealand in styles that made them recognisable as such. Batten points out the manner in which this movement shaped the look of the visual arts in her essay *Art and Identity*.¹²⁸ Figures such as Roland Hipkins had drawn attention to “features” that were typical of the country and publicly encouraged their inclusion in painting. These included the diverse elements of New Zealand landscape and flora.¹²⁹ Batten contends that the resultant work was still not in a truly ‘New Zealand’ style, because a change in subjects was only one of a number of requirements.¹³⁰ Be that as it may, the same artists who worked these subjects had also altered their treatment of landscape especially, adopting palettes that better represented the colours and harsh light of their surroundings.¹³¹

Working in this social climate certainly shaped Taylor’s views. As we have already seen, he believed in art’s universal qualities, and in the importance of communication. The Nationalist debate in which he worked encouraged his focus to turn to indigenous subjects. He came to feel that art should say something to the New Zealand viewer about their own identity, and the country in which they lived. This was a clearly Nationalist view. Taylor reached this realisation through his personal involvement in the debate. Although directions had been suggested for a reborn New Zealand art by those such as Hipkins, they were often reactionary against the art practice of Britain and Continental Europe. Exactly what course art and its practice in this country should take was argued vigorously in forums such as *The New Zealand Listener*. In one issue, the concerns about whether artists should be given encouragement, or made to struggle was considered. Taylor’s letter states he benefited from his beginnings as a jewellery engraver, and goes on to say, “I often feel that there is too much ‘back-scratching’ going on amongst a number of our artists, with the result that although in their own opinions they are pretty good, they are actually not getting anywhere at all”.¹³² In the same issue MacLennan wrote, “For any artist, if he is to get to the top, discouragement is a good thing; he must go through the schools and get a thorough

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid. p. 215.

¹³⁰ Ibid. pp. 215- 16.

¹³¹ Hipkins had been closely affiliated with Taylor in Wellington, and had in fact given him his first set of gravers. Mackle, *Interview: Mrs Teddy Henderson [E. Y. Taylor], 2 November 1987/ Tony Mackle*. Some controversy surrounds this point, however, as Teddy is reputed to have also suggested Taylor’s former teacher, Arthur C. Hipwell had provided the tools. Here I have adopted the interpretation my own research suggests to be the closest.

¹³² Various, “Back to the Attic with Art?,” *The New Zealand Listener* 1947. (unpaginated clipping).

training".¹³³ This kind of debate over identity was greatly enabled by the publication of new magazines such as *The New Zealand Listener*, as well as *Art in New Zealand*, begun in 1928, *The Yearbook of the Arts in New Zealand*, from 1946, *Landfall*, begun in 1947, and *Design Review*, from 1948 till 1954. From these magazines, and within groups such as the Architectural Centre, a New Zealand art philosophy was developed. These forums for nationalist debate directed Taylor's focus onto New Zealand subjects.

A facet of post-war nationalism worth highlighting was the gradual change in pakeha attitudes to Maori coinciding with the return of the Maori Battalion from service. There was a commonly held belief that the trial of battle together had done a great deal to improving race relations in New Zealand, and that the shared experience of the war had created a bond between Maori and pakeha previously absent.¹³⁴ Despite his affiliations with the nationalist movement, Taylor did not appear to be motivated by this particular event to explore Maori subjects in his art. He was already well aware of Maori myths before the Second World War had begun. A number of factors contributed to engage his interest after the war, but they were predominantly artistic concerns, as demonstrated previously. More importantly, attention to Maori culture generated by the profile of the Maori Battalion may have acted to stimulate interest in Taylor's work.

Distaste for nationalist art, as mentioned earlier, has left Taylor and many of his contemporaries disadvantaged. That he was once described as, "one of our best propagandists"¹³⁵ (a term commonly used during the nationalist movement with positive connotations), has taken on unsavoury meanings since his time. As seen, Taylor was not a propagandist in the modern sense. He drew attention to native landscape, the flora, fauna and culture of this country, but did not prescribe ways of seeing them. In doing so he was fulfilling a logical outcome of his philosophy. In contributing to debate about art, he was part of the search for New Zealand identity, and tried to reconcile his philosophy with the thinking of others. The enthusiasm found in the nationalist movement in New Zealand art was in this sense common to

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ J. Phillips, "War and National Identity," in *Culture and Identity in New Zealand*, ed. W. E. Willmott and D. Novitz (Wellington: G. P. Books, 1989), p. 97.

¹³⁵ I.E., "Pioneer Artist of the Pacific," *The Dominion*, August 18 August 18, 1962. (unpaginated clipping).

most art movements throughout recent history. As a result of nationalist passion for rebirth, real change was affected in the arts at this time. Taylor's was a nationalist artist, but was more than just this, which his art clearly reflected.

The third aspect of Taylor's philosophy, regionalism, originated in his close ties to his local environment. He was not directly concerned with conservation, indeed his work predates the popular rise of conservation philosophy in New Zealand,¹³⁶ but was deeply affected by his surroundings his whole life. Taylor did not travel beyond New Zealand until 1958, six years before his death, and so did not have the experience of working in Europe that influenced the careers of some post-World War Two New Zealand artists. Examining Taylor's early works shows that he focussed from the very beginning on rendering the landscapes and features of his close surroundings. *Dark Valley, South Karori* (1937), was Taylor's first wood engraving, executed shortly after he moved to Wellington in that year. *Road to Makara*, (c 1936-1937), *Church at Makara*, (1937), and many other works document Wellington and its surrounding areas. The Karori Reserve was located just above Taylor's Hatton Street residence on the hills of Karori. He had a great fondness for this area, and drew many of his forest, plant and bird subjects from this and other nearby locations. *Weta* (c 1946), was an engraving sketched after an insect found in his own garden. Likewise, Makara is only a short distance to the northwest of Karori. Taylor frequently went on sketching trips, but seldom travelled further afield than the Wellington area. He was foremost a Wellington artist in this sense. Within an art historical context, he fits alongside regionalist artists such as Doris Lusk, Rita Angus and William Sutton, who shared similar attitudes to their environment, and also shared exhibition space with him, as seen previously.¹³⁷

The other part of Taylor's regionalism was his adoption of a vocabulary of elements from native scenery to "place" his works, not only as New Zealand works but also to demonstrate their individual locations. Ground ferns, tree ferns, and kauri trees were depicted in the forest, and tree stumps were characteristic of his depictions of cleared land. These elements were included to make the place of the work clear in

¹³⁶ Taylor predates popular conservation ideology, but not the conservation movement. Figures such as Leonard Cockayne were involved in this from the first decade of the twentieth century. This is not to say that Taylor was not concerned for the native environment, which he had clear affinity for in his work. His art is likely to have amplified popular concern for conservation from the late 1950s onward.

¹³⁷ The Group, "The Group Exhibition Catalogue." (1949).

conjunction with topography. Taylor used these forms in a generalised and often expressive manner, and most importantly, he also applied them as devices for the same “locating” effect to engravings of Maori subjects. In his smaller illustrations and tailpieces, such as *Carved Figure From Pou-Tokomanawa* (1947) [fig. 7], *Maori Figure* (1950) [fig. 16], and *Maori Mask* (1955) [fig. 21] this is particularly evident. As shown, these kind of works were often based on museum study of carvings, but then creatively composed and detailed, most often with ferns, to locate them as New Zealand works. The fronds and other details like kowhai flowers are used as dynamic devices, and as framing for the central composition of the carving. In a modern context, his use of two sets of signifiers; Maori carvings and native plants seems slightly heavy-handed. Taylor’s audience in the 1940s and 1950s, however, were just beginning to make the connections between these subjects and New Zealand identity that the modern viewer makes automatically. Modern familiarity is largely due to the work of popularisers such as Taylor. The use of these devices, together with his firm connection with Wellington and its surrounding environs, show Taylor to be a true regionalist artist. His depiction of mamaku in his landscapes are at once his own motif, and also intensely reminiscent of the Wellington area bush. His art is inextricably bound to the local environment in this sense.

How then, did Taylor manage to reconcile the three ideological positions: universalism, nationalism, and regionalism? The answer is that in developing an integrated philosophy on which to base his artwork, he needed to draw from all three, but was never so extreme in his application of these ideas that they entered into conflict. Taylor was a moderate artist who did not indulge in polemical theories of art. He strove for a natural balance of the three positions applied in his art, universal qualities that enabled the work to communicate across cultures, qualities evocative of New Zealand identity, and also those elements of the close environment in which Taylor lived.

For Taylor to engage Maori subjects in his art was a logical outcome of his philosophy. He felt that it was an aspect of New Zealand that had been ignored, and he was not alone in this view. If reissue of collections of traditional Maori stories is a measure, then the 1950s represented a groundswell of interest in Maori culture as previously demonstrated. As also seen, he perceived that the depth and richness of

Maori mythology could be explored through art, and he became fascinated with it. Through repeated exposure his resolve strengthened to further engage with Maori culture; a process that was reinforced by fellow artists, and Maori and pakeha friends alike. All of this process was underpinned by his philosophical belief in the importance of communicating indigenous and local content through his work. Enthusiasm driven by principles was the reason he was able to develop his work on Maori subjects to the high standard he did.

The work itself is the best evidence of his beliefs. He communicated his subjects accessibly, and with excellent clarity. The universal appeal of Taylor's work placed him in an international context even during his life. He also expressed chosen subjects and motifs, particularly those from Maori culture, as symbols of national identity. In doing so he contributed to the current definition of identity in New Zealand. His works not only demonstrated national features, but also regional ones, which is why his art is so particularly resonant within the Wellington area. His foundation belief that craft had to be the basis of art practice reconciled the elements of his philosophy, but it also enabled a reconciliation of these elements in his artwork. Through craft quality, Taylor communicated ideas of universal, national and regional significance together, and with exceptional clarity. The integrity with which he acted on closely considered beliefs in crafting these works is demonstrated through their enduring quality. This is perhaps the finest tribute he gave to Maori.

Chapter Four: *Grey's Polynesian Mythology: the opportunity of a career*

The most significant project of Taylor's career remains his planned illustration of George Grey's *Polynesian Mythology* (1855). Although never completed, for reasons of scale, financial hardship, and ultimately being eclipsed to publishing by another book, it nevertheless represents a culmination of his philosophy, his skill as a craftsman, and of meticulous and extended study of Maori people and their culture. By bringing together these components the project cements Taylor's place in New Zealand twentieth century art as an artist who played a key role in popularising Maori culture in post-war New Zealand, breaking the ground for later artists to work in this area. Only by exploring his chief influences in taking on this project, examining the history and scope of the planned project, and analysing what he achieved, can Taylor's place in the history of New Zealand art be completely appreciated.

As seen previously, illustrative projects by his peers from Maori mythology surrounded Taylor. He capitalised on this influence, launching himself into the subject area. In February 1946 he produced his first engraving on a Maori subject,¹³⁸ and by the 1950s was at the pinnacle of his field. The engravings he produced are one of the most important bodies of work on Maori mythology by a printmaker in the twentieth century. They achieve a new level of sophistication in their interpretation of Maori culture, made possible by Taylor's close interest in Maori, and the energy he put into engaging with Maori people, both of which made him an exceptional artist in his time. The prints are also the product of a master wood engraver who attained new heights of technical control while making them. His work on Maori mythology motivated Taylor to rise artistically to the challenges interpreting the stories presented. He was passionately interested in the rich narrative that early collections of mythology offered, and this passion is seen in his diverse and nuanced treatment of them. In exploring his project to illustrate *Polynesian Mythology*, the context of his project will be shown by first examining the two collections that most influenced him; Stewart MacLennan's illustrations for *Legend of Maui* (1938) and George Woods' illustrations for *Myths and Legends of Maoriland* (1946).

¹³⁸This work was *Maui Escaping the Fire Goddess*, or more generically titled as *Legend of Maui*, when published in *A Book of Wood Engravings* (1946) [fig. 3].

Stewart MacLennan's illustrated version of George Grey's *Polynesian Mythology, Legend of Maui* (1938), was of immense importance in relation to Taylor's similar project; it was the earliest precedent on the subject of Maori myth produced by his peers, and also the first work on Maori mythology illustrated with wood engravings. It was a very different work to that which Taylor began formally in 1952. These works are a treatment of Maori by someone who had yet come to terms with the culture. The illustrations for MacLennan's *Legend of Maui* are like a sketchbook in part; in that they provide a sketched and suggested view of the world of Maui. As shown in the engraving *Maui Washed Ashore*, (1938) [fig. ii], the treatment of the figures of the infant Maui and Tama-nui-ki-te-Rangi is highly simplified. They are depicted as a kindly old man with a faceless infant, with little else of the story portrayed in the engraving, save the waves breaking on the beach where Maui is found. *Maui Taming The Sun* (1938) [fig.iii], is even more generalised. Shadowy figures of Maui and his brothers are unrecognisable as individuals. They haul on ropes to slow the sun on its path, but there is none of the central action or heroism that animates Taylor's work of the same title of 1948. Other works from the book suggest that not all the content was designed specifically for the project, including unlikely features such as rabbits and a train. These examples also have more careful compositions than the others, indicating these were works MacLennan had made previously and wanted to include. The engravings also do not reference appropriately to the events that they portray, often being located opposite an unrelated page.

The sketchiness and incompleteness of these engravings is at once suggestive of a mythological world and a primitive one. As such, he depicts the characters in the stories with a generality that could place them anywhere in any "primitive" society. This contrasts specifically with Taylor's later works on the same subjects, where he frames them as distinctively Maori, and locates them in New Zealand. The figures look child-like in their innocence and at ease in their surroundings. They resemble Gauguin's paintings of Tahiti such as *I Raro Te Ovirī (Under The Pandanus Trees)* (1891), in which Tahitians are similarly portrayed as both innocent and peaceful inhabitants of paradise. MacLennan's figures in fact are not recognisably Maori, their features a mixture of races: Australian Aboriginal, or Asian. This generalisation, and depiction of Maori in a manner that is wholly unrealistic appears distasteful today, but shows the influence of the Primitivist tradition from which MacLennan drew his

depictions of Maori for this book. MacLennan at the time had little concrete experience of Maori, or their culture, although he did go on to represent Maori far better, more realistically as his career progressed.

The engravings in this book represented an early exploration into the subject. They are heavily influenced by his training by British printmakers like Paul and John Nash. In their simplification and exoticised setting, they also bear obvious influence of John Farleigh's engravings for *The Adventure of the Black Girl in Her Search for God* (1932), a work that MacLennan would have become familiar with during his study in London. It is, then, appropriate to see the book as a transitional work and a student work, demonstrating more of influence of England than a genuine interpretation of indigenous New Zealand culture. While the works contained some good passages of design, they were not of the level of quality that MacLennan developed in his mature work.

Conversely, George Woods' illustrations for *Myths and Legends of Maoriland* (1946) were very carefully constructed. A sense of taught design is evident in every illustration made for the book. They are scraperboard drawings, with two painted colour plates. His drawings emphasise Maori facial features, and lithe, muscular physiques. They include features of native surroundings to situate the works in a New Zealand context, including birds, tangled vines, and kauri trunks delineate this. The illustrations often adopt an heroic character when describing dramatic passages, as demonstrated clearly in *The Battle of The Wind and Sea Gods* (c 1946) [fig. iv]. Tawhiri and Tangaroa buffet each other in contest with the full force of their elements. Woods depicts sinuous tension in their muscles, which is echoed in the turbulent cloud and sea forms. *Kae Clung to the Back of the Whale* (c 1946) [fig. v], is also filled with graphically depicted tension. In this work, Kae straddles the whale's back while its huge flukes whistle through the air above his head, its body churning the sea to foam.

The treatment of moko in Woods' drawings is interesting because it indicates the level of his confidence drawing Maori motif. As it appears frequently, but is sketchy in its execution, seems likely that in 1946 he was not sufficiently assured with Maori motif to depict them boldly. The proviso must be made, however, that scraperboard

drawings are a white line medium, and discourage depiction of dark line design, particularly curves.

Woods is known as a careful designer,¹³⁹ and his drawings for this book attained a new standard for him in both design and execution. This may be due to the inclusion of works by Wilhelm Dittmer alongside his own, setting a high standard of illustrative quality for Woods to meet. The addition of Dittmer's drawings from his *Te Tohunga* (1907) made the book of illustrative importance. Dittmer was a German artist who had lived in New Zealand between 1898 and 1905. While here, he had collected accounts of Maori mythology from Maori elders. As Bell asserts, Dittmer was primarily an artist, and had conceived the book around a set of drawings he had made on mythological themes; the text itself was sometimes misrepresentative and contained inaccuracies.¹⁴⁰

Dittmer's drawings for *Te Tohunga* stand as fascinating and unusual in their response to Maori culture and motif. He presented Maori characters in the myths as stereotypes: as the mystic high priest, the femme fatale, as ritualistic savages beholden to terrible gods. Dittmer's background as a symbolist artist contributed to his use of these stereotypes,¹⁴¹ and his belief, like Goldie and Lindauer that Maori were a dying race whose culture needed to be documented.¹⁴² In terms of treatment of motif, Dittmer's response to Maori art in his drawings was to play on its organic and graphic qualities. He used curvilinear patterns to convey the magical forces present in the stories, exploding them out from the surface of figures and objects with rays. This treatment is often used fancifully, but clearly from the drawings Dittmer was a talented observer of motif. His application of curvilinear design in this way demonstrates his place in the movement of Art Nouveau.¹⁴³ The range of Dittmer's ideas may be seen in *Farewell to Hawaiki* (c 1905)[fig. vi], which depicts a surreal scene that at once evokes ritualism, the primitive, the exotic, and the strangeness of Maori motif. His use of motif here as sun rays is incongruous to Maori art forms as they are understood in New Zealand. This is a view of Maori through European eyes,

¹³⁹ Mackle, "George Woods (1898-1963)." p. 89.

¹⁴⁰ L. Bell, "Wilhelm Dittmer's 'Te Tohunga', 1907: A Symbolist Presentation of Maori Mythology," *Bulletin of New Zealand Art History*, no. 4 (1976). p. 17.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. pp. 19-20.

¹⁴² Ibid. p. 17.

¹⁴³ Ibid. p. 21.

and reflects the tendency of artists of Dittmer's era to depict the "otherness" they perceived in Maori and their culture.

Inclusion of Dittmer's drawings in *Myths and Legends of Maoriland* was nevertheless important. Dittmer was talented and imaginative in his compositions, and design quality of his works proved influential for both Taylor's and Woods' work on Maori themes. Taylor later responded in his prints to Dittmer's use of Maori motif as design device, but in a restrained fashion. His closer understanding of Maori culture and identification of it with national identity led him to avoid Dittmer's exoticism.

Since *Korero* in the early 1940s, Taylor had become aware of the potential of New Zealand subjects. As such, he was often mystified that scholarships and grants available for artists in New Zealand remained driven by travel and study overseas. For him, by the 1950s, there was no question of travelling abroad for study purposes; all his subjects were based on New Zealand culture, and he had firmly settled into the Wellington arts scene. He felt that "there was so much to study here".¹⁴⁴ On this basis, he applied for the New Zealand Association of Fine Art Societies Scholarship. Until the previous year, this scholarship had been solely for overseas study.¹⁴⁵ Taylor's application was sufficiently convincing, having stipulated he wished to work on illustrations for an adaptation of George Grey's *Polynesian Mythology*. His submission also strongly argued the importance of representing New Zealand subjects in local art, and stated his intent to study in the Bay of Plenty.¹⁴⁶ He was awarded the prestigious scholarship in 1952, which was for £1000 over two years.¹⁴⁷

Later in 1952, he travelled to Te Kaha in the eastern Bay of Plenty. Here, he stayed with Beth and Patu Ranapia.¹⁴⁸ Patu was a bus driver, and Beth was a local schoolteacher. This friendship proved useful to Taylor; while staying in Te Kaha, he based his activities around the school.¹⁴⁹ It was here Taylor first met and befriended

¹⁴⁴ Mackle, *Interview: Mrs Teddy Henderson [E. Y. Taylor], 2 November 1987/ Tony Mackle*.

¹⁴⁵ "Wellington Artist Working to Illustrate Maori Legends with Wood Engravings," *Dominion*, 24/06/1953.

¹⁴⁶ Taylor, "Interview with the Author 26/07/2002."

¹⁴⁷ "Wins Thousand Pound Scholarship," *Evening Post*, 13/5 1952. (unpaginated clipping).

¹⁴⁸ Mackle, *Interview: Mrs Teddy Henderson [E. Y. Taylor], 2 November 1987/ Tony Mackle*. (This had been arranged through a friend of Taylor's, Tom Hazeldine, a Wellington City Council architect. Beth's brother, Robert McGregor was a colleague of Hazeldine.)

¹⁴⁹ Taylor, *Electronic Mail Communication with the Author 10/01/06*. Beth Ranapira went on to become the first Maori editor at School Publications.

Cliff Whiting and Paratene Matchitt, then schoolboys.¹⁵⁰ While in Te Kaha, Taylor “sketched Maori heads, studied Maori physique, watched the people working, listened to them talking”.¹⁵¹ He took notes and talked to locals about Maori mythology. He also practised conversational Maori learned at the Ngati Poneke Club. While he never obtained the fluency he desired, his attempts were capable enough to win respect from Bay of Plenty Maori he met.¹⁵²

This first trip to Te Kaha was cut short to only three months for several reasons. The scholarship money was generous, but Taylor had a family in Wellington to support.¹⁵³ He applied for dispensation to complete the study part time, in order to accept work commissions to ease the financial burden,¹⁵⁴ which was accepted. Illness also played a part in shortening his stay at Te Kaha.¹⁵⁵ Taylor did travel back to Te Kaha in summer several times between 1953 and 1955,¹⁵⁶ but each time the pressure of supporting his family brought him back to Wellington.

What did Taylor plan for this project, and how much did he achieve? It is difficult to quantify exactly what kind of book Taylor would have produced, as *Polynesian Mythology* was never brought very close to publishing. Nor were all the illustrations completed. Some information, however, is available regarding the work that Taylor did complete. Taylor did not plan to document a specific story, as in MacLennan’s *Legend of Maui*. Rather, extant evidence suggests Taylor planned a grand version of *Polynesian Mythology*, encompassing many of the original stories collected by Grey. There were twentythree stories in the original 1855 edition. Illustrated in its totality, the project far exceeded time available to him, and represented a huge potential workload, which must have pressured him to abridge the collection somewhat. This practice was common with mythology collections during Taylor’s life; the commercial market would typically drive their content, rather than a concern for completeness.¹⁵⁷ Grey himself abridged some stories in his volume, as they were not

¹⁵⁰ Taylor, "Interview with the Author 26/07/2002."

¹⁵¹ Beaglehole, "Script for E. Mervyn Taylor's Eulogy." p. 25.

¹⁵² Taylor, "Interview with the Author 26/07/2002."

¹⁵³ Terence Taylor suggests that his father felt obligated to provide for the family, and didn’t believe that Teddy should have to work. Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Beaglehole, "Script for E. Mervyn Taylor's Eulogy."

¹⁵⁵ Taylor, "Interview with the Author 26/07/2002."

¹⁵⁶ Taylor, *Electronic Mail Communication with the Author* 22/01/06.

¹⁵⁷ Reed, *Myths and Legends of Maoriland*. pp. 9-10.

wholly tasteful for a European audience.¹⁵⁸ Market demands often required an emphasis on popular stories, such as those featuring Maui, Hinemoa, Tane, and other more readily known myths. On the basis of Taylor's plans, however, this collection would have been the most comprehensive adaptation released since the original book by Grey.

Evidence suggests Taylor planned thirty engravings for the collection, most likely twenty major works and another ten minor works.¹⁵⁹ They were to be printed on a book format 248x147 millimetres wide. Incomplete notes and layouts by Taylor indicate which legends from *Polynesian Mythology* he intended using. These were: "The Children of Heaven and Earth", "The Legend of Maui", "The Legend of Tawhaki", "The Legend of Kae's Theft of the Whale", "The Legend of Rata", "The Story of Uenuku, and "The Story of Hinemoa". In these stories, some scenes he planned to illustrate were: the separation of Rangi and Papa, the creation of people, the birth of Maui, Maui taming the sun, Maui as a pigeon, Maui escaping Mahuika, Maui fishing up the North Island, the death of Maui, Kae and the whale, and Hinemoa.¹⁶⁰ Based on this information, a list may be extrapolated of seven completed major engravings that were intended for the book: *Maui Taming the Sun* (1948) [fig. 10], *Te Kotuku Rerenga Tahi* (1953) [fig. 19], *Hinemoa* (1955) [fig. 24], *Separation of Papa and Rangi* (1955), *Maui Escaping from Mahuika* (1956), *Tane the Creator* (1956) [fig. 25], and *Maui Washed Ashore* (1957). *Kae and the Whale* (unfinished block) [fig. 30] was almost certain to have been included. It was one of the stories that Taylor indicated he would illustrate, and was the correct format.¹⁶¹ On this basis Taylor brought almost half of the major works in the project to completion.

Small works such as *Lintel Figure* (1954), *Koruru* (1954), and *Maori Figure* (1955) would have been utilised by Taylor to evoke the mood of the stories. Details observed from carvings, and of the forest and its creatures, would have placed the myths in their native context. This practice can be seen in Taylor's much earlier narrative book

¹⁵⁸ G. Grey, *Polynesian Mythology and Ancient Traditional History of the New Zealand Race, as Furnished by Their Priests and Chiefs* (London: John Murray, 1855). p. 64.

¹⁵⁹ "Wellington Artist Working to Illustrate Maori Legends with Wood Engravings."

¹⁶⁰ Statements about the plans for *Polynesian Mythology* during this paragraph are all based on communication with Terence Taylor. References to the project among his papers and a few draft layouts are all that exists to extrapolate from. T. Taylor, *Electronic Mail Communication with the Author 11/01/06* (2006).

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

project *Taina*, (1948). In *Taina*, the smaller engravings hold interest, by providing illustrative focus for the reader's attention. During less engaging passages in the text, tailpieces and borders help to sustain the reader's interest, while the story builds to an event described by a large engraving. The scenes of *Polynesian Mythology* entailed much more dramatic action than those in *Taina*, which was a slow moving memoir. However, Taylor saw this layout of illustrations and text with major and minor wood engravings employed by MacLennan in *Legend of Maui*, and in many books by English wood engravers.

Unfortunately, the collection was never finished by Taylor. Circumstances and the sheer size of the project made its completion unobtainable. The first reason for the project's failure was the amount of work required. The thirty engravings Taylor needed was a demanding target. Wood engravings are a time consuming form of illustration; the fine line of the graver does not easily fill spaces, and large engravings require much more intense attention to composition than tailpieces. By choosing engraving to illustrate such a large project, Taylor had a difficult task. MacLennan had made a total of fifteen engravings for *Legend of Maui* with a few larger works, but predominantly medium sized pieces. As previously examined, MacLennan's style of engraving in the book was free, and simplified. Their sketch-like quality indicates the economy with which they were made. A simple approach was taken to pattern and surface design; indeed, their surface quality seldom rewards closer examination. The engravings for *Legend of Maui*, were clearly carried out quickly, with limited attention to detail.

Taylor was a much more considered and careful worker, and he designed detail with concern for the overall structure of the piece. Considering this degree of scrutiny, his project was monumental by comparison with MacLennan's. Taylor estimated it took a week on average to complete each engraving.¹⁶² Only eighteen months would have been left for Taylor to conduct his research in Te Kaha and elsewhere before commencing work on the engravings. This created a dilemma for him. He wanted to lend authenticity to the collection and, as such, a considerable amount of drawing of Maori was an avowed intention for this period, as demonstrated by a story from *The Dominion* newspaper in 1953: "Study is necessary, [Taylor] finds; otherwise where

¹⁶² "Wellington Artist Working to Illustrate Maori Legends with Wood Engravings."

figure work is used it would tend to become stylised. ‘Maoris are physically different from Europeans,’ he says.”¹⁶³ He had to balance the time spent drawing, and researching the myths, against the necessity of working on the thirty engravings.

This was not to say that the project was simply too difficult for him. Taylor had a strong reputation for working hard; it was often normal for him to work twelve hour days.¹⁶⁴ The project, rather, was monumental by the standards of any artist. When financial circumstances became difficult, the goal became more difficult to obtain. The £1000 scholarship proved much less than sufficient to fund Taylor’s research and provide for his family in Wellington. Though a considerable sum, it did not provide sufficient funds over the two years, then beyond, while he still tried to pursue the project. Having to take commercial work to survive financially diverted his time from the collection. He remained committed to finishing the project, making engravings for it through the 1950s, but his vision was never realised. The final factor that contributed to the non-completion of Taylor’s mythology project was the publication by Whitcombe and Tombs in 1956 of a comprehensive version of Grey’s *Polynesian Mythology*, illustrated by Russell Clark. After this Taylor realised that his intended niche was filled.

Leaving *Polynesian Mythology* unfinished and unpublished remained a disappointment to Taylor for the remainder of his life. Though Maori mythology was only one subject area in his varied career, he knew the collection would have been an important work. He had even planned to expand on the idea earlier, in 1953. In an interview, he spoke of wanting to travel around the Pacific studying local myths for another illustrative project.¹⁶⁵

In final examination, that Taylor chose to spend his scholarship in New Zealand studying Maori culture rather than on overseas travel, and was the first recipient of this award to do so is of historical significance. Taylor’s experience at Te Kaha and research for *Polynesian Mythology* informed his art practice for the rest of his life. It is one of the most significant explorations of a pakeha artist into Maori culture during the twentieth century. While it is unfortunate that *Polynesian Mythology* was not

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ T. Taylor, *Electronic Mail Communication with the Author* 8/01/06 (2006).

completed, his reputation did not suffer for this. The prints that Taylor finished for the project were among his best explorations of Maori mythology. In them he achieved a new integration of design and skill as a printmaker with sensitive interpretation of the myths. They are a culmination of his engagement with Maori, and artistically they attain new quality, as will be shown in the next chapter.

¹⁶⁵ "Wellington Artist Working to Illustrate Maori Legends with Wood Engravings." *Dominion*, 24/06/1953, (unpaginated clipping).

Chapter Five: *A thematic survey of E. Mervyn Taylor's prints on Maori subjects*

Taylor worked on an extensive range of subjects during his printmaking career. This included playbills of Shakespearian scenes, natural history, and bookplates to the Maori themes examined here. This diversity reflected his nature, as well as commercial necessity. He was a complex man, whose interests and enthusiasms were highly eclectic. As such, within his work on Maori themes there were groups, linked by composition, or the ideas they tried to portray. He reworked compositions throughout his career, developing and changing them, and applying them to different subjects. Those derived from Maori mythology and culture lent themselves to this approach, as they had narrative richness and depth for interpretation. Taylor explored this in his prints, in doing so translating them into multifaceted and entertaining artworks.

This chapter examines the prints Taylor produced on Maori themes. It is not an exhaustive catalogue, but a survey through significant works. In doing so, it is useful to adopt his recurring compositions and thematic groups as a framework for analysis. Several recurring compositions originate in *Taina*, the illustrative project where he first focussed wholly on Maori, and which invigorated his interest in the wider sphere of Maori culture, as demonstrated. Other such compositions derive from his work for School Publications. Within compositional groups, Taylor depicted themes representing different aspects of his artistic interests. They can also, however, be seen as set pieces, or thematic stories, which interpret different aspects of Maori mythology, such as heroism or spirituality, and themes from Western art tradition.

Recurring characters and motifs also populate the prints. This demonstrates that Taylor's initial understanding of the Maori mythological world was generalised, and his early mythic artworks relied on creating a mythological sensation, rather than the substantial study leading to rigorously accurate depiction that characterised his later works. There is a clear chronological development of Taylor's comprehension of Maori mythology from the time he begins interpreting its stories. His later mythological engravings display his more sophisticated understanding of their source.

The earlier works do not consistently achieve this. The important works from Taylor's wide-ranging career that derive influence from Maori culture will be examined here. They will be shown in context of other works of similar theme and composition, contributing to a more substantial understanding of their place in Taylor's oeuvre.

The first set of works examined are those that display dramatic action. This group is united by strong graphic qualities: dynamic lines, portrayal of charged action and explosive structure in their similarly centralised compositions. They also include heroic or titanic themes. These works capture the dramatic action of Maori mythic stories. They are designed to be visually explosive. In them Taylor also attempted reconciliation of two kinds of surface pattern. His experimentation with rays and parallel swirls from the mid 1940s marked the beginning of his diversion from the English conventions of wood engraving, and the next step in his stylistic evolution was the fusion of these elements with Maori pattern. In choosing these particular motifs two major influences are demonstrated. The first is the art of Wilhelm Dittmer, which, as shown, had contributed considerably to Taylor's early interest in illustrating Maori mythology. Dittmer frequently made use of rays in his composition, usually depicting koru motifs in a stylised Art Nouveau manner.¹⁶⁶ Any influence Dittmer had on Taylor's adoption of ray motifs was likely modified through the aesthetic climate of the 1940s, in which sun rays were popular motifs in the graphic arts and in decoration. The second influence toward the use of parallel swirls in mythic compositions was the work of English wood engravers, particularly John Buckland-Wright. Taylor was well aware of Buckland-Wright's engravings of this kind from the 1930s.¹⁶⁷ In terms of Taylor's eventual incorporation of Maori motifs, the copying of carvings while working for School Publications, and then on *Taina* between 1947 and 1948 certainly influenced his approach to design. As such, he was pursuing a particularly individual course in his art, and his work portraying mythic action most clearly distinguishes his style from that of his close contemporaries, Clark, Woods and MacLennan, as well as other local artists. These works also establish a clear difference between Taylor and the British wood engravers: Eric Gill, Agnes Miller Parker, Eric Ravillious, and Gertrude Hermes. Taylor had been very enthusiastic for their work up to this point in his career, and had borrowed from them in his

¹⁶⁶ Bell, "Wilhelm Dittmer's "Te Tohunga", 1907: A Symbolist Presentation of Maori Mythology." p. 21.

compositions,¹⁶⁸ but his greater use of Maori subjects in his printmaking led to the establishment of a style that was uniquely his own.

These works are the strongest, most focused statements in design that he ever created and, as will be demonstrated, are at the forefront of the transition between Taylor's use of conventional engraving marks, and the move to his own style of pattern-making. They are complex works to interpret because of the action depicted, but contain very similar features that are hallmarks of their author. Taylor used a few set compositions for these works, tending at different times more or less toward concern with graphically dynamic components, or with surface pattern and texture, which was often sourced from Maori art. Emphasis on dynamism or pattern was fitting in the treatment of different subjects. The former was appropriate for portraying the immensity of events of Maori cosmology, the latter suited to visually anchoring works and creating deeper interest, as well as evoking the texture of indigenous New Zealand, endowing the prints with a sense of place. This group of works originated, as shown, in Taylor's discovery of George Grey's *Polynesian Mythology*, and they represent the heroic tradition of Maori. For Taylor, they fulfilled his desires to represent indigenous subjects to the greater population, a function that depicting the flora and fauna of New Zealand alone could not. They were also more exciting stories to tell. Given his affinity for the subject matter then, it is fitting that Taylor was able to trial these stories in illustrative form as drawings on the cover of the School Journals in 1946.

During that year, a series of Maori legends derived from Grey's *Polynesian Mythology* was produced. As seen in Chapter Two, drawings were made by Taylor, Clark, and MacLennan, as well as other School Publications artists such as Juliet Peter. *How Maui Snared the Sun*, (September, 1945) [fig. 1], and *Kupe and the Octopus* (1946) [fig. 2], were made by Taylor. The former was significantly his first ever work on a mythological subject. These two works are early examples of a composition that Taylor used repeatedly. In them, Taylor experimented with the composition of a figure in the lower right of the work stretching their arm back to strike at a central mass. In these cases, the figures of Maui and Kupe respectively hold a club and a spear, menacing the Sun's stylised face, and the rearing octopus. Taylor

¹⁶⁷ T. Taylor, *Electronic Mail Communication with the Author 14/10/06* (2006).

further refined this prototype two years later in the exceptional wood engraving, *Maui taming the Sun* (1948) [fig.10]. This was one of the engravings he submitted for the Association of New Zealand Art Societies scholarship in 1952. In the print, the figure of the sun is a carved Maori head, with some patches of empty space or holes, which allow the white light to burst from within. The light of the sun is dramatically depicted in parallel rays from the centre of the sun's head, incised into the predominant unworked black of the outside areas of the print. Maui's brothers strain on ropes at the fringes, while Maui is silhouetted closest to the centre, beating the sun's face with his club.¹⁶⁹ The composition creates tension between the parallel rays of light and curvilinear designs. It is balanced by the use of moko designs on the sun's face, acting as a central hub. The importance of the moko in the scheme is demonstrated in *How Maui Snared the Sun*, where the sun's face described without moko unbalances the composition, sitting uneasily in the middle, its lack of pattern drawing attention elsewhere. *Maui Taming the Sun* was a significant step forward in Taylor's integration of pattern in design, and use of Maori motifs in his prints.

Taylor's work from heroic myth contains devices that were characteristic of his personal style, many of which were developed on these works. In these prints, Taylor created compositions that were wound tightly, with swirling forceful lines that led to dramatic central focal points.¹⁷⁰ Another important example of Taylor's use of the curving line in tension with rays is *The Magical Wooden Head* (1952) [fig. 17]. One of Taylor's largest and most ambitious engravings, it was another submission for the ANZAS scholarship. The work depicts the legend (collected by George Grey), in which the tohunga Hakawau defeats the magic carved wooden head controlled by Puarata and Tautuhito with his sorcery. Here Taylor employs a similar composition to *Maui Taming the Sun*, but enriches it with more complex moko designs on the head,

¹⁶⁸ Horrell, "Natural Themes in the Wood Engravings of E. Mervyn Taylor". p. 19.

¹⁶⁹ Maui's club is differently described as both his grandmother's jawbone (in the original text accompanying the calendar for which the work was commissioned), and a fern root, both of which had cultural significance in being potent objects for damaging the mana of the sun, removing his power. Taylor chose to represent these as a more conventional club, or patu shape, which is indistinct enough to be any of these objects. He probably did so to aid recognition for the wider audience, the kind of compromise that was unfortunate but necessary.

¹⁷⁰ This device was one that the artist had in common with the technique Maori carvers employed to create sense of movement in their works. The use of carved spirals on the areas where figures generated movement; the shoulders, arms and knees, the defiant outstretched tongue, enlivens works greatly. The spiral device is identified with Maori art, but is cross-cultural as a symbol. When Taylor employed circular dynamics in his own works, he was, consciously or otherwise, using a similar

and a pattern of swirls that echo the force of the interaction between the figure of Hakawau and the wooden head. The swirls are a graphic device, but also represent the magic taking place, also indicated by the shooting stars in the sky above. Hakawau holds the gaze of the wooden head, represented by two piercing diagonal rays that interrupt all other design. The tonality of the work is less contrasting than in previously described works; illumination by a starlit sky allows the subtleties of the patterning on the wooden head to be better appreciated. Though a finely engraved work, it is particularly bold in its mark making, and is a very clear synthesis of Maori pattern into a figurative composition. This print bears little semblance to the patterning of the English wood engravers; there is a complete absence of cross-hatching. Instead, short parallel-cut, tapered lines are used in waves to evoke a rhythmical, pulsing texture in the waves of force around the figures. In this regard, the work is one of the best examples of Taylor's sheer technical control of the medium. It also exemplifies his development of the centralised composition type, and is a sophisticated advance from *Maui Taming the Sun*.

In *Te Kotuku Rerenga Tahi* (1953) [fig.19], Taylor utilises many elements from the previous work to a different compositional end. Commissioned for the visit of Queen Elizabeth II during 1954, it takes its title from the Maori myth in which Tane travels to the twelfth heaven to bring back three baskets of knowledge, and is accompanied by the white heron or kotuku only on his ascent. As an analogy, the title of the work is a Maori description of a distinguished guest that visits only occasionally in a lifetime, the reason the title was later formally bestowed on the British monarch, and its use carried down to Elizabeth II. This work is more figurative than others described in this section, and the central figure of the white heron is depicted in quite naturalistic detail. The other figures, however, are generalised to mere darkened shapes, evoking the cosmological nature of the subject. This treatment of figures may refer back to those Taylor had seen in MacLennan's *Legend of Maui*, such as *Maui Taming the Sun* (1938) [fig. iii]. Unlike *The Magical Wooden Head* there is no attempt to include curvilinear elements from Maori design. Taylor instead employs a range of devices that allude to celestial events. Stars and comets, sunrays and bolts of lightning all jostle within the frame. An upward swirling trail from the heron's wings forms the

solution to the problem of static composition that Maori carvers had employed long before. T. Barrow, *An Illustrated Guide to Maori Art* (Auckland: Reed Methuen, 1984), p. 46.

dominant element beneath, while the open armed figure in the sun welcomes it from above, sunrays bursting forth from behind the figure's silhouette. *Te Kotuku Rerenga Tahi* is one of Taylor's finest engravings. In it, he maintained a balance between the graphic dynamics found in earlier works of this kind, and elegance of form.

Taylor's later engraving, *Separation of Rangi and Papa* (1955), uses similar motifs to portray another cosmologically significant subject. Lightning is also a motif seen in that composition, and its use demonstrates Taylor was finding his own pictorial language for representing the Maori mythology, and was not bound by conventional precedents in doing so. The uneasy balance in Taylor's oeuvre between his periodic development of new styles, such as the changes demonstrated between engraving *Maui Taming the Sun*, and *The Magical Wooden Head*, and work along more conventional lines, has led to some negative criticism in the past.¹⁷¹ Rather than viewing him as an artist struggling to be progressive, however, it is more accurate to view Taylor as an artist willing to explore a number of styles to better convey meaning in his work. The stylistic shift found in works such as *Te Kotuku Rerenga Tahi*, and *Separation of Rangi and Papa* emphasises this point.

In depicting the myth of Maui and Mahuika, the fire goddess, Taylor works again in the generalised form. He returns, however, to the portrayal of forceful interaction seen in *Maui Taming the Sun*, by surrounding the two figures in flame, conveying the sense of drama of Maui's escape. These works, *Maui Escaping from the Fire Goddess* (1946)[Fig. 3], *Maui and the Fire Goddess* (1952) [fig. 18], and *Maui fleeing from Mahuika* (1956), all depict Maui escaping in the form of a bird, with Mahuika forming the background for his figure, personified as fire. Her hostile, disembodied eyes glare at Maui, with her hands shaped from flame reaching from out to catch his fleeing form. Maui is clearly visible in human form inside the body of a falcon, which flies up and to the right, escaping her grasp. The 1952 work, a lino print, bears strong compositional similarities to a cover illustration of this story from the *New Zealand School Journal* in 1946 by Stewart MacLennan. Taylor was well aware of MacLennan's treatment of the story having contributed two works to the series in which this appeared. Clearly, he reworked MacLennan's composition to his own ends.

¹⁷¹ Here, I refer mainly to Francis Pound's comments in *The Space Between*, documented in Chapter Two. That Taylor exhibited a process of stylistic development but did not move toward abstraction, is something Pound confuses for being regressive in his criticism of Taylor.

The last of this group of Taylor's prints and his final work, is the unfinished woodblock of *Kae and the Whale* [fig. 30]. While not completed sufficiently to see the whole composition resolved, but contains dramatic curve work leading into a central area, over the shape of the whale, placing it with the other compositions in this section. In this block, he makes reference to George Woods' earlier treatment of the subject in *Kae Clung To the Back of the Whale* (c1946) [fig. v]. The flukes and tail are arranged at the same angle (which would reverse on printing). Taylor's arrangement of the figure of Kae, however, cannot be determined, and in his work the whole whale is included in the frame of composition.

The next group of Taylor's work to examine is not unified by style, as much as subject. It is the works that pictured Maori in pre-European New Zealand. Taylor made a moderate number of these works through his career, the most being found in the illustrations for *Taina*, and the Imperial Chemical Industries calendar *Original Wood Engravings by E. Mervyn Taylor* (1949). Some of these works, such as *War Canoe* (1947) [fig. 6], and *Girl Feeding Tapu Chief* (1948) [fig. 8] have been discussed earlier in relation to *Taina*. From his initial depictions of Maori in *Taina*, his prints on this subject quickly became more sophisticated. A representative of the I.C.I. calendar collection is the engraving *Korero* (1948) [fig. 9], which occurs on the median point of this development. It shows the inside of a meeting-house, in which a seated group of figures listen to the orator in the middle, speaking and gesturing dramatically with a taiaha to illustrate his point. The lighting is dim, and the decoration of the house, its carvings and tukutuku panels is suggested rather than closely described by Taylor. *Korero* has a strong composition, which is anchored by the textural detail in the scene and the interaction between the seated group, the central figure, and a poutokomanawa, or post figure on his right side. His depiction of Maori figures, however, is not as confident as in his later works, though they are improved from the figure work of *Taina*. Taylor made very few works depicting Maori in pre-European settings during the 1950s and onwards, but those such as *Waka Taua* (1956), demonstrate his greater skill in the treatment of the figures and carvings. Some of this development is attributable to his experience drawing Maori in *Te Kaha* between 1952 and 1955.

There is another group of prints that is unified by subtle compositions that place subjects in a forest context. These reflect Taylor's interest in depicting indigenous life of New Zealand. They evoke the feel of native bush, and provide it as a context for Maori creation myths. Scenes in these prints are represented with a fine detailed approach to composition very different from the dramatic graphic emphasis of the heroic legends of Maui. Flora and fauna play an important part in these compositions, demarcating the works as indigenous, and acquainting the viewer intimately with the animals and plants of New Zealand as characters and subjects worth appreciation in their own right.¹⁷² In the works of this group that depict creation myth, flora and fauna also take on symbolic character as the children of Tane. The prints are also connected closely with Taylor's many engravings of flora and fauna, in which the detail of an individual flower, bird, or insect is studied with as much attention as would traditionally befit landscape or the human figure. Prints such as *Weta* (1946), indicate where Taylor derived his treatment of Maori creation myths. His depiction of the weta, with darkened and subtly detailed form, has the same intimate atmosphere depicted in the mythical works, where soft light penetrates through forest canopy to illuminate his subjects delicately, as if at dawn or dusk.

These prints certainly form a cohesive group, yet their subjects differ. Taylor does not approach Maori creation myths literally in all the scenes. This is the case for *Idyll* (1949) [fig. 15], a scene of poetic reverie, two lovers lying calmly together in a forest setting. *Idyll* is the most idealised of these works, but all share this contemplative setting, and more than a little idealism. There are similarities with work by the English neo-romantic artist John Craxton, whose *Poet in Landscape* (1941), evokes a very similar atmosphere, with a figure nestled into, and almost protected by its forest surroundings.¹⁷³

The earliest engraving in this group is *Creation* (1947) [fig. 4], in which Maori creation myths are explored in a generalised way by Taylor. This print has elements of several myths included in its composition. Interpretation of this work is various.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² Taylor made many works on the flora and fauna of New Zealand which are not discussed as part of this thesis. He was almost as renowned for these works as those on Maori subjects.

¹⁷³ Craxton and the neo-Romantics are more likely to be the source of any influence because Taylor had been exposed to their work, and perhaps to their ideas via MacLennan, who studied in London under Paul and John Nash before returning to New Zealand in 1939.

¹⁷⁴ Interpretations ranging as widely as the first light entering the world after the separation of Rangi and Papa, to a Christian God giving Eve to Adam. The latter is unlikely though, as Taylor had little

Taylor chose to make this work evocative of creation, rather than directly descriptive of a mythical story. It is suggested here that the large extended hand is that of Tane. He holds the resting form of the first woman: Hineatauirā. The central form of the hand is darkened, but around its edge is a proliferation of life. Birds such as kiwi and kotuku are depicted, as well as lush ferns and other vegetation, and a lizard. The lizard in particular has an interesting significance in the work. Although lizards appear in a number of Taylor's prints in this group, it was in the form of this animal that Maui perished while trying to enter the womb of the Maori personification of death, Hinenuitepo, while she lay asleep, attempting to win eternal life. Hinenuitepo was the name that Hineatauirā took after she assumed this role, so the inclusion of the lizard in *Creation* refers, perhaps, to both the beginning and end of a mythological episode.

Taylor's inclusion of these native animals and plants places the legend in New Zealand, and also refers to the richness and diversity of indigenous life to suggest notions of creation and fertility. His frequent depictions of identifiable indigenous flora and fauna in his prints were founded in his belief that New Zealanders should be made aware of their natural heritage, the same reason that he wished to popularise Maori culture. Because of their combination of indigenous natural and mythic elements, *Creation*, and the other works of this group are some of the most identifiably New Zealand artworks of this time. Such work in particular proved very popular with foreign diplomats based in Wellington, during the later years of Taylor's career.¹⁷⁵

Creation of Hineahuone (1954) [fig. 20], varies the basic composition of *Creation*, depicting the figure of the first woman, whom Tane formed from earth, with Tane in the foreground, about to breath life into her inanimate body. Tane is depicted again, in the background pushing his parents Ranginui and Papatuanuku apart to let light into the world. The way Taylor deliberately avoids chronological order by combining these events suggests some influence of religious art on his work; using continuous narrative in one scene was a device well established for artists since medieval times.

time for religion, and it appears very infrequently in his work. T. Taylor, *Electronic Mail Communication with the Author* 26/01/06 (2006).

¹⁷⁵ Mackle, *Interview: Mrs Teddy Henderson [E. Y. Taylor]*, 2 November 1987/ Tony Mackle. This popularity also continued after Taylor's death, as the former Mexican ambassador Jorge Alvarez was an avid collector of his prints.

Clearly, this technique fitted the purpose of conveying the range of Maori creation stories well enough for him to appropriate the technique in this print.

Aside from the main figures in the print, are a number of other elements that refer to the cosmological nature of the scene, and evoke an idea of creation. The darkened, silhouetted lighting of the scene contains a profusion of stars, which float downwards in front of Tane's head, creating tensions of scale that suggest that the scene is not merely from human life. To the right of Tane's figure in the foreground, a huge cloud of birds rises into the sky, with a heron flying up also on the right. The birds in this scene are particularly reminiscent of a Buckland-Wright illustration from *The Collected Sonnets of John Keats* (1930), in which simplified birds fly up in clouds in front of a darkened background.¹⁷⁶ Likewise, a cloud of butterflies and moths surrounds Tane's outstretched hand, moving toward Hineahuone's body. Flanking her form on the left is a whimsical depiction of a taniwha, shown as an upright, crocodile-like form, with three pairs of arms and protruding, elliptical eyes that obviously refer to Maori carvings. Completing the composition at the bottom are a seal, a tuatara, a kiwi and two pukekos, sitting and observing the scene from amongst the vegetation at the water's edge. The animals are rendered at different scales, which also informs the viewer that the scene is evocative rather than descriptive of a real forest scene. That all these creatures seem to act in concert in this print completes the feeling of fertility, and mythical origination that Taylor strives for.

It is interesting to contrast the composition of *Creation of Hineahuone* with that of *Tane the Creator* (1956) [fig. 25], engraved just two years later. The former is gently and subtly composed. It displays Taylor's talented use of graphic elements; the moon creates a focal point, darkening the forms of the central figures, compelling the viewer to look closer. It is by no means as lively as the latter work, however, which makes much greater use of striking arrangements of vegetation around its margins, in order to create a circular central focus, set high within a rectangular frame.

Tane the Creator contains many similar elements to the former work, but they are this time presented dramatically. The figures of Tane and Hineatauirā are depicted as

¹⁷⁶ A. Garrett, *British Wood Engraving of the 20th Century* (London: Scolar Press, 1980), p. 81. (Although it is not certain whether Taylor knew of this engraving it is likely, as he was well acquainted with Buckland-Wright's work, having mentioned him in the foreword to *Engravings on Wood*.)

forms of solid black, but now against the background of a rising sun, illuminating a very foreshortened mountain range, creating an even more uncertain sense of scale than in *Creation of Hineahuone*. Amplifying this is a dynamic arrangement of foliage in the foreground, which frames the scene. Here, Taylor has deliberately exploited the striking linear nature of some indigenous plants; depicting flaxes, a shield fern and a nikau palm, whose fronds form the upper rays of a swirling spiral that surrounds the figures. Branches with elliptical leaves are also shown, but instead of providing greater detail of these, as the viewer would expect of a foreground element, Taylor abstracts them into striking planes of light and dark, emphasising the effect of harsh light on glossy, evergreen foliage. There are other, more closely detailed elements within this frame. The figures of a kiwi, a fantail, a snail and lizard appear, as well as a cloud of butterflies and moths as seen in *Creation of Hineahuone*. Above, the white heron is again shown amidst a cloud of other birds ascending skywards above Tane and Hineatauirā. More subtle vegetative forms are also shown; clematis blossom and an unfurling fern frond provide a softer contrast to more linear forms. This print provides excellent evidence of the way that Taylor “manages” the way that the viewer looks at his work. He creates central forms that are less obvious and often darkened, so that the eye is drawn first to stronger elements on the frame, then sees the central design, then lastly travels outward to see the subtle detail ignored at first sighting of the work. Taylor demonstrated an astute understanding of the way that people view prints to be able to control their gaze with such exactitude. No doubt this was due in part to his training in poster art, and over twenty years of working in graphic design by this stage in his career.

Idyll, (1949) is an early variation on Taylor’s mythic works that displays the repose of two lovers in a forest scene. Gone is the obvious symbolism of the other works. Instead, *Idyll* is a contemplative scene. A Maori man and woman lie naked together on a feather cloak, ambiguously suggesting a pre-European scene, and the foliage of the bush closes in around them. A pair of tuis are also shown, one alighting on the woman’s finger, while a lizard looks upwards at them from the lower right. Taylor’s interest in graphic dynamics is demonstrated by the sun, with its rays leading into a focal point of light above the scene, although its illumination only penetrates the foliage canopy partially, and the shafts of light are not so integral to the composition.

Typically, he provides a balance for the sun in the form of spreading fern fronds picked out in white in the lower right of the work.

The central point of the work, however, is the two lovers, and he makes a clever visual comparison between the limbs of the two figures, and the sinuous tree branches and roots above and below which creates interest. The figures are dimly lit, but are picked out in careful detail, with just enough attention to hatching made to show the details of their muscle. The hatching also softens their forms and renders them far more sensuous than characters from previously discussed prints specifically based on creation myths. Although the emphasis is sensual, and the work is clearly made for contemplative pleasure, Taylor stops short of the sexualised treatment found in the engravings of Buckland-Wright. For Taylor, it is the overall impression of the figures and the bush that creates sensuality, while Buckland-Wright's works depicting female forms were often designed solely for the male gaze, and the setting was mostly irrelevant.¹⁷⁷

In *Hinemoa*, (1955, engraving) [fig. 24], (1957, linocut) [fig. 26], Taylor departs from dynamic design based prints for a simpler portrait of the figure of Hinemoa, standing combing her hair in the moonlit water, listening for the music played by Tutanekai.¹⁷⁸ The later reworking as a linocut preserves the essential composition. It translates the engraving to a larger format, including colour. Both versions of *Hinemoa* synthesise serene aspects of the creation myth works and *Idyll*, and signal the final development in this phase of Taylor's prints, foreshadowing the elegant, white line portraits that later became his defining style.

Hinemoa combines only a few clearly identifiable elements, making its composition elegant and easy to read. Hinemoa stands upright, in silhouette against a white background of moonlit water. Her body is solid black defined with sparse use of white line. Behind her head and torso, trees with bare trunks loosely imitate her nude form. Ferns and a shrub form a frame, and a large fern at the base interrupts the composition, drawing attention to the circular ripple at her feet. In the background, stars and cloud add interest to the sky, but the overall effect is of a calm yet carefully

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. (Buckland-Wright retained this inclination when depicting the female body through most of his career. Examples may be seen in pp. 81 – 83 of the aforementioned text.)

¹⁷⁸ Taylor had previously dealt with the subject in *Hinemoa and Tutanekai* (1948), a vigorous composition with two figures that was published in an ICI Calendar alongside *Maui taming the Sun*.

composed scene. Though the work portrays Hinemoa in a scene from the narrative of her and Tutanekai, the story is used this time by Taylor to concentrate on depicting the serene beauty of Hinemoa combing her hair in the moonlight. In this sense *Hinemoa*, and *Idyll*, are best seen as the predecessors of the next group of work, in which Taylor came to concentrate solely on idealised portraiture to its own end.

Among the most elegant of Taylor's printed works are a group of refined, stylised and idealised portraits of Maori. They are at once the logical progression of works such as *Idyll* and *Hinemoa*, and also look forward to the sculptural work of his later life. Indeed, these works share their simplicity with Taylor's carving, as in both his later prints and sculpture, he used as few lines and contours as were necessary to produce a balanced composition. This was clearly a measure of the decisiveness that he had acquired over the preceding years, allowing him great economy in his design. Further, it also reflects his liking of certainty in those mediums he chose to work in. He disliked reworking,¹⁷⁹ and the decisiveness of a simplified composition appealed to him. As Terence Taylor suggests, by this stage, "he had developed a confidence in the simple line."¹⁸⁰

There is another reason for this change of style, however; the physical demands that engraving had placed on him. His son elaborates: "Engraving was slow and his eyes were being affected by age as well as pain across the neck and shoulders. It became a struggle to complete a block".¹⁸¹ Taylor's state of health necessitated a different style of working, and the prints of this period reflect this need. But to speak of these works as simple is somewhat misleading. Their compositions are carefully weighted, so that a minimum of elements still carry visual impact. The white lines with which their forms are picked out are decisive and sinuous. Taylor had become so proficient by this point at cutting long, natural curves that he made lines which would challenge most printmakers appear effortless. It is precisely this ease that creates a false sense of simplicity in these prints and Taylor's later sculpture. They are still complex in their design by virtue of what Taylor omitted from their composition.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ Horrell, "Natural Themes in the Wood Engravings of E. Mervyn Taylor". p. 1.

¹⁸⁰ Taylor.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Also, the influence of Eric Gill may be seen in the simple white line portraits of these prints. Taylor had been aware of Gill's work as a printmaker and typographer from the 1940s, mentioning him in the introduction to *Engravings on Wood*.

Two portrait works from 1955 mark the beginnings of this phase in Taylor's work. *Rewi, Maori Boy* (1955) [fig. 23], and *Hina, Maori Girl* (1955) [fig. 22], are engraved on Southland beech wood, the coarser of Taylor's working materials, and yet display much delicacy in their portrayal of the two children in profile. The works are like silhouettes, but the subjects are set against a black background and within a rectangular frame. Lighting is again minimal, and reminiscent of that used in *Idyll*. The facial features of the children are sparsely yet carefully detailed, with hatching indicating the illumination of facial contour. Their hair and clothing is deliberately simple, the clothing in particular, which is reduced to a few lines indicating the edges, as in a quick drawing. The hair consists of curving lines of white, coarser than those used in the face, and that of the boy is perhaps the more effective of the two figures. His slightly downcast head is neatly composed in the frame, and the detail of his hair and ear is elegantly engraved. The initial impression of these works is of very simple, fluid studies of the children, with light use of the graver. Upon closer inspection, it is possible to see exactly how tightly composed the works are, as evidenced by the numerous, detailed drawings from which Taylor developed the engravings.¹⁸³ The elegance of these works lies in the restraint exercised with detail. In doing this, Taylor also worked appropriately to the medium of the beech wood, which although hard, was not as suited for detailed cutting as box.

Mai (1957) [fig. 27], develops this style further, by reducing all of the detail into linear form. A linocut, *Mai* shows the head and shoulders of a Maori woman, who faces to the front of the frame, turned slightly to one side. Her face is depicted in black line, and her hair, which frames her portrait on three sides, is black, and demarcated with greenish yellow which is the base colour of the paper. Any semblance of hatching or shading has been discarded; the flow of simple curved lines around her face, from light to dark and then back, forms sufficient interest to negate the need of detail. The details of her face are picked out finely, and although it is apparent that her face is but a flat, un-contoured surface, the curves describing her eyes, nose, mouth, and few strands of hair are sufficiently convincing to create the illusion of three-dimensionality. The light coloured line depicting her hair is simpler

¹⁸³ The drawings may currently be seen at: Ferner, *E. Mervyn Taylor: Artworks by Artist* (Ferner Galleries, 2005 [15/11 2005]); available from www.fernergalleries.co.nz/artwaorksbyartist,220.do.

still. In *Mai*, Taylor's continued elimination of unnecessary elements as seen before in *Rewi, Maori Boy*, and *Hina, Maori Girl* is acutely evident.

Serenity (1959) [fig. 28], furthers the abstraction and simple line style found in *Mai* to a still greater extent. Also a lino cut, it simplifies all aspects of the print, which depicts a woman in profile. *Serenity* combines the pictorial devices that Taylor utilised in *Hina, Maori Girl*, and *Mai*, taking the treatment of features in a profile from the former, and from the latter the use of wide lines that conveys a sense of illusory depth, from their intrusion into the black base. This time the woman's profile is elongated into a very slender, upright, rectangular work, framed mainly by the predominant black edge. The effect is also magnified by the space given to her hair, the downward flow of which is the dominant element of the composition. In *Serenity*, Taylor develops the way that lines are expressed, that significantly alter in thickness as they lengthen. This modulation substitutes for the total absence of shading in the print. The thicker portions of lines express zones of brighter light on the subject, while the more slender lines and their tapered points express the opposite.

Serenity derives from Taylor's carving, which he had taken up with great enthusiasm after encouragement by Russell Clark while staying with him in Christchurch during 1957. The print is reworked from a sculpture in totara of the same name, made in 1958, and is recognisably aimed at achieving the same visual statement. The carved piece has the same emphasis on elongation, and the figure turns away to expose a minimalist profile. Sculpture revitalised Taylor's printmaking toward the end of his life, when the physical demands of engraving had become obstructive. He was able to play with ideas between two mediums, and by this stage certainly had a clear sense of the features that printmaking and carving had in common.

The spare style in which Taylor worked at the end of his career was a triumph of design, and a culmination of considerable experience with printmaking. These works display the confidence and capability of a master of his craft. As he grew older, the smaller detail of wood engraving was harder to perform, but he became able to strip down compositions to their most basic elements. This was not a modernist approach, in the manner of abstract painters such as McCahon and Walters, who began to gain

attention for their work after 1960.¹⁸⁴ The change in style arguably had more to do with the trend to a simpler, Japanese inflected aesthetic in the late 1950s and early 1960s in New Zealand, and perhaps also the influence of George Woods.¹⁸⁵ This was ironic, so far as the diffuse influence of Asian art should take so long to find its way to Taylor, despite his late affinity with it.¹⁸⁶ Unlike modernist abstraction, Taylor's later approach was that of a hugely experienced figurative artist. His considered simplicity was not influenced by, but was analogous to the calculated simplification of Zen Buddhist painting and calligraphy.¹⁸⁷ Through years of working in printmaking, he had gained the control and confidence to make sophisticated prints with only the most basic elements.

These groups of prints unified by theme and composition represent the range of Taylor's talents. Many artists have been content to rework one or two themes, or to delve into a subject only once or twice. It is testimony to Taylor's self critical nature and drive to keep working that he maintained momentum through his printmaking life; reworking ideas constantly, refining version after version. His output was prolific, resulting in over two hundred wood blocks alone during his career.¹⁸⁸ Coupled with the amount of careful study with which he sourced and composed his work, this represented considerable energy and time. The themes he worked on covered a wide spectrum of different ideas and compositional types; even excluding his work in other mediums this was a remarkable achievement, considering that almost all of his prints were produced over the period between 1945 and 1960. By reinterpreting themes and reworking compositions, Taylor was able to develop impressive results, as seen in *The Magical Wooden Head*, *Te Kotuku Rerenga Tahi*, and *Serenity*. As we encounter his work in the larger context of art history, it is important to view it through this framework of continual refinement in which he created his prints. A lasting appreciation for Taylor's work may be gained from inquiry into the connections and associations between the artworks of his oeuvre.

¹⁸⁴ M. Dunn, "Gordon Walters (1919 - 1995)," *Art New Zealand* 1995. p. 92.

¹⁸⁵ Taylor, "Interview with the Author 26/07/2002."

¹⁸⁶ In fact, Taylor exhibited in the first and second International Exhibitions of Graphic Art in Tokyo during 1957, and 1960. Patience, "'Emigravit', Ernest Mervyn Taylor, 1906-1964." p. 217.

¹⁸⁷ As practised by artists like Muqi (c 1200's), Chinese, Southern Song Dynasty.

¹⁸⁸ Mackle, "E. Mervyn Taylor (1906-64)." p. 73.

Conclusion

This thesis has sought to demonstrate that E. Mervyn Taylor's prints are important both art historically and nationally. Their excellence and their engagement with Maori should place him alongside contemporaries such as Colin McCahon, Rita Angus and William Sutton as an innovative New Zealand artist. Like them, Taylor made a lasting contribution to New Zealand identity with his art.

Most of the factors that influenced Taylor toward his choice of Maori subjects and his emphasis on craftsmanship were found in his early career. His five-year apprenticeship as a jewellery engraver founded his belief in the importance of good craft and technical understanding. His association with Russell Clark, Stewart MacLennan and George Woods supported this; those artists had also experienced training regimes that reinforced craft quality, like those of Clark's teacher Robert Nettleton Field. Working alongside these artists in the commercial arts, and on the *New Zealand School Journal* stimulated Taylor's artwork by exposing him to a constant flow of new ideas. His interest in printmaking, especially wood engraving, was also stimulated by them. He had done printmaking classes alongside George Woods in 1936,¹⁸⁹ and was encouraged in his initial attempts at wood engraving by Stewart MacLennan in 1939.¹⁹⁰ MacLennan's *Legend of Maui* (1938), was significantly, Taylor's first introduction to the illustration of Maori mythology. That Taylor developed depictions of mythological subjects in concert with the others was evidenced by works appearing in the *School Journal*, and in his early works such as *Maui Escaping from the Fire Goddess* (1946) [fig. 3].¹⁹¹ Other precedents such as George Woods' illustrations for *Myths and Legends of Maoriland* (1946) certainly contributed to his subsequent deep exploration of these subjects, as his wife E. Y. Taylor suggested.¹⁹² Though Taylor progressed further than any of his contemporaries in exploring Maori culture in his prints, his early development should not be viewed independently of their considerable impact on his choice of subjects.

¹⁸⁹ Taylor, *Electronic Mail Communication with the Author* 10/01/06.

¹⁹⁰ MacLennan, *Catalogue of Wood Engravings, Colour Prints, and Drawings by E. Mervyn Taylor*.

¹⁹¹ It has been remarked that this was a re-working of Stewart MacLennan's composition, found as the cover illustration of the *New Zealand School Journal* Vol.40, no.3, part II, April 1947.

¹⁹² Mackle, *Interview: Mrs Teddy Henderson [E. Y. Taylor]*, 2 November 1987/ Tony Mackle.

That Taylor was more than the sum of the influence of Clark, Woods and MacLennan was shown in the second chapter. The development of Taylor's interest in Maori subjects began with his initial introduction to them by E. Y. Taylor. He fuelled his interest by reading George Grey's *Polynesian Mythology* (1855), and by drawing from carvings to gain illustrative material for the *School Journal*, and *Taina* (1948), which had encouraged his strong appreciation of Maori culture.¹⁹³ Membership of the Polynesian Society before the Second World War, and the Ngati Poneke Club in the early 1950s, gave him valuable insight into Maori culture; members such as Bill Ngata provided him with source material and interpretations for his print works on mythological subjects. His experience at Ngati Poneke cemented his appreciation of this culture. It provided the inspiration for his most sophisticated engravings on mythical subjects during the 1950s, such as *The Magical Wooden Head* (1952) [fig. 17]. It also provided impetus for him to use the New Zealand Association of Fine Arts Societies scholarship, won in 1952, in New Zealand, researching Maori mythology.

Taylor's confident use of Maori motif and subjects in his prints necessitated his placement in the modern debate over cultural appropriation. Francis Pound's criticisms of Taylor were shown in the second chapter to fail to take proper consideration of the equivalence of Taylor's appropriation of Maori culture and motif with that of Gordon Walters, in terms of their shared history as contributors for *Te Ao Hou*, and common backgrounds. Taylor was also examined according to the arguments of Rangihiroa Panoho, and the inconsistencies of Panoho's assertion that only Maori artists should explore their culture in art were demonstrated. Further, Taylor's appropriation was also shown by Panoho's own criteria to have been benignly conducted, and adequately reciprocated to Maori.

In the examination of Taylor's philosophical beliefs on art in the third chapter, his place in nationalist and regionalist movements of New Zealand art was shown. He associated with influential figures in the nationalist art debate such as Roland Hipkins, and was active in debating the purpose of New Zealand art in forums such as *The New Zealand Listener*, and *The Yearbook of the Arts in New Zealand*. As a regionalist artist, the connection between his prints and his landscape painting was noted, as was the crossover of natural motifs from his regional landscapes of Wellington into his

¹⁹³ Beaglehole, "Script for E. Mervyn Taylor's Eulogy." p. 11.

depiction of Maori subjects; evidenced in works such as *Idyll* (1949) [fig 15]. These works placed him beside other regionalist artists such as Sutton, McCahon, Angus and Doris Lusk.¹⁹⁴ Involvement in these movements in art predisposed Taylor toward indigenous features to characterise his prints as New Zealand art, an expression of identity.¹⁹⁵ His involvement in these movements supported the intensification of his interest in depicting Maori.

The most significant expression of Taylor's interest in Maori was his work toward illustration of George Grey's *Polynesian Mythology*. In Chapter Four, he was seen to have spent months in Te Kaha researching and drawing, to instil realism in his depictions of Maori. The completion of *Polynesian Mythology* proved impossible for Taylor, due to the pressures of supporting his family in Wellington, and the project was abandoned. Reconstruction of the project in this thesis from remnant notes and layouts indicated the scale of the work, and provided new insight into the largest undertaking of Taylor's career, the scheme of which had not hitherto been discussed in a scholarly context. Taylor's research for *Polynesian Mythology* was found to have had a stimulating effect on his work through his use of voluminous drawings he made of Maori as a source for his later printmaking.

Taylor's engravings for *Polynesian Mythology* were exemplary of his drive to rework and perfect individual themes. The analysis of his prints in the fifth chapter draws on groups of compositions that he reworked. The connection between early compositions, such as *How Maui Snared the Sun*, (1945) [fig. 1], and later prints, such as *The Magical Wooden Head*, was shown. Through reworking, he refined early compositions, and created sophisticated later versions of them in his prints. This analysis was repeated through different compositional groups, and the similar links of influence were shown, demonstrating a process of development took place during his printmaking career. The simplification of Taylor's printmaking style in his late career that characterised his stylised portraits of Maori resulted from confidence and skill that Taylor developed as an experienced printmaker, and as a response to failing physical health. These works, such as *Mai* (1957) [fig. 27], and *Serenity* (1959) [fig. 28], contained complicated solutions to the description of shading and light that belied their apparently simple designs, evidence of his proficiency as a printmaker and

¹⁹⁴ Taylor exhibited beside these artists here: The Group, "The Group Exhibition Catalogue." (1949).

designer. Through a career-long process of reworking Taylor stripped composition down to its base elements.

In light of these findings, it is not surprising that Taylor's popularity is again ascending. He is demonstrably an artist of quality, and to this extent it is unfortunate his reputation became obscure in the years following his death. Examining Taylor in terms of his prints on Maori themes was appropriate, as these were works that proved so popular during his life he became synonymous with them.¹⁹⁶ More than this, these prints were a considerable achievement as a body of work in themselves, demonstrating the depth of Taylor's thoughtfulness in producing them, and the progression of ideas by Taylor's constant self-critical urge to rework and improve quality. Technically, they were printmaking of an international standard, and it is of little surprise that Taylor won acclaim as a wood engraver internationally during the late 1950s.¹⁹⁷

That he found appreciation offshore is ironic, as he placed much importance in his identity as a New Zealander. The contribution of Taylor's prints on Maori subjects in the history of biculturalism in New Zealand is important. Taylor's significance in a national context was the primary reason for re-evaluation of his prints on Maori subjects. They are uniquely resonant in New Zealand art history, and for this Taylor was equivalent with other artists of his time in the way he developed an enduring expression of New Zealand in his oeuvre.

¹⁹⁵ Batten, "Art and Identity." p. 215.

¹⁹⁶ During his lifetime, he lamented this association, particularly with works on Maori subjects, commenting, "people think I never do anything else". Newick, "An Artist Who Calls Himself a Craftsman." p. 9.

¹⁹⁷ In his later career, Taylor had several important showings of his prints overseas. At the Museum of Natural History, New York, in 1954, and in the first and second International Biennial Exhibition of Graphic Art in 1957 and 1959 in Tokyo. He also travelled for the first time from New Zealand in 1958, touring his works in England, the United States, Czechoslovakia and Russia. These exhibitions were all well received.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank those who have been helpful to him while conducting the research for this thesis.

The first thanks are due to Terence Taylor, who was kind enough to invite me into his home in 2001 to talk about his father, and who has been unfailingly helpful with my intrusions since then. He has a most realistic understanding of Mervyn as a person, some of which I hope appears in this thesis.

Thanks also to Tony Mackle at Te Papa Tongarewa Museum of New Zealand, whose excellent research into E. Mervyn Taylor was my starting point. Marian Minson at the Alexander Turnbull Library, Linda Tyler at the Hocken Library, Peter Vangioni at the Christchurch Art Gallery, Kate Szrich at Ferner Galleries, and Dr Mark Stocker, who first introduced me to Taylor's wood engraving.

Many thanks are also due to Dr Jillian Cassidy my patient Senior Supervisor, and Dr Deidre Brown, who was very helpful during her short involvement.

Thanks to my sister Amiria Horrell, who worked tirelessly with me on proofing and editing.

And lastly to Anna, who weathered my work for this project with compassion and patience that surprised us both.

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Appendix: Illustrations

List of Illustrations

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- [fig. 4] *Creation*, (1947).
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[fig. 1]

How Maui Snared the Sun, (September 1945) pen and ink.

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[fig. 3] *Maui Escaping from the Fire Goddess (1946).*



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[fig. 6] *War Canoe*, (1947).



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[fig. 14] *Shark's Tooth Knife*, (c 1948).



[fig. 15] *Idyll*, (1949).



[fig. 16] *Maori Figure*, (1950).



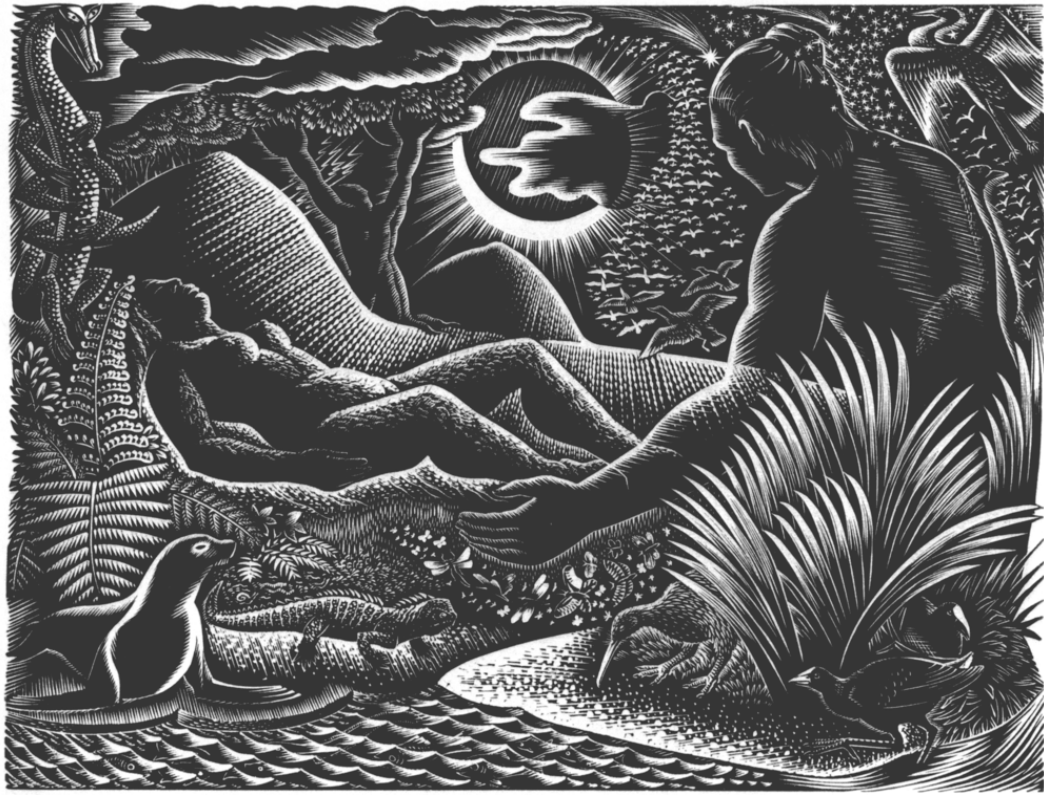
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[fig. 29] *Pare Figure*, (1961) carved wood.



[fig. 30] *Kae and the Whale*, unfinished woodblock.



[fig. i] Arawa, Bay of Plenty. *Centrepost figure, Poutokomanawa*, (c 1860).



[fig. ii] Stewart MacLennan, *Maui Washed Ashore*, (1938).



[fig. iii] Stewart MacLennan, *Maui Taming The Sun*, (1938).



[fig. iv] George Woods, *The Battle of the Wind and Sea Gods*, (c 1946)
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[fig. v] George Woods, *Kae Clung to the Back of the Whale*, (c 1946)

scraperboard drawing.



[fig. vi] Wilhelm Dittmer, *Farewell to Hawaiki*, (c 1905) pen and ink.

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Te Papa Tongarewa Museum of New Zealand, Wellington.
Figures 26 and 27.

The Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.
Figures 18, 20, 24, 24, and 29.

Christchurch Art Gallery / permission Terence Taylor.
Figures 4 and 28.

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Figures ii, and iii.

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Figure i.

Terence Taylor collection
Figure 30.

